Wings and Freedom, Spirit and Self:
How the Filmography of Hayao Miyazaki Subverts Nation Branding and Soft Power

Shadow (BA Hons)
195408

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Contents

Abstract

For close to four decades, the work of Hayao Miyazaki has been presented throughout the world as the pinnacle of Japanese cinematic animation. Often referred to by fans as "the Walt Disney of the East", Miyazaki has created films that delight people of all ages. Yet Miyazaki does not see what he does as providing simple entertainment and distractions. Rather, Miyazaki's entire filmography courses with his personal ideologies; from his environmentalism to his anti-extreme capitalism stance, his views of pacifism, his concern with interpersonal connection as well as the ideas of love and justice intrinsic to his view of humanity. His works have also been used by various vested interests – including the Japanese government and corporate-media entities – to push awareness of, and increase desire for, Japanese brands, media (specifically anime), and cultural products.

This thesis focuses on a close reading of two of his works, *Porco Rosso* (1992) and *Spirited Away* (2001), where the purpose is to examine how these two films demonstrate Miyazaki's subversion of many national branding and soft power programmes. This is further supported by drawing upon the works of academics such as Susan J. Napier, Ayumi Suzuki, Tai Wei Lim, Kevin M. Moist and Michael Bartholow.

Within this context, this thesis demonstrates the central motifs and thematic representations which can be seen as subversive or at least challenging to an imposed ideology. The core of Miyazaki's works can be read as setting up subtle critiques of various social and governmental policies and practices over the past few decades. With many of them centring around how Japan should perceive itself, how its people should behave and how they should codify their identities in order to conform to invented norms. This is done through the use of visual and narrative markers as well as through the construction of characters to be reflections of the times in which they were created – specifically the so-called Lost Decade (1991-2002), a period in which a faltering economy pressured the Japanese government to increase their national branding and soft power programmes in order to combat external and internal perceptions of weakness and failure. With *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away* coming at the beginning and end of that period, these films best demonstrate Miyazaki's subversion of the

way Japanese enactors and investors sought to control all discourses surrounding (self and national) branding and soft power.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> To my way of thinking, creating animation means creating a fictional world. That world soothes the spirit of those who are disheartened and exhausted from dealing with the sharp edges of reality, or suffering from the nearsighted distortion of their emotions. When the audience is watching animation, they are apt to feel either light and cheerful or purified and refreshed.
>
> Miyazaki (2009:25)

Purposes

The primary purpose of this thesis is to widen discourse within the discipline of Media and Communications in the areas of Japanese media (primarily anime) and (national) branding and soft power. This is done by demonstrating how the Japanese animation director Hayao Miyazaki has used his films to subvert and question how programme enactors[1] and investors[2] attempt to influence social discourse, perceptions and policies both within Japan and globally. This is in relation to undertakings by various Japanese programme enactors and investors to gain a stronger market dominance and more favourable reception for Japan as a whole by altering social discourses and perceptions of and within the country. Said programme enactors include but are not limited to: the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry – which

[1] For the purposes of this thesis 'programme enactors' are defined as active participants in branding and soft power policies and programs. This includes Japanese government agencies/departments such as Foreign Affairs and Trade and Tourism and media producer/production houses.

[2] For the purposes of these thesis 'programme investors' are defined as those who financially invest in or benefit from branding and soft power programs but maintain a more passive role -such as the Japanese government (i.e. the Diet/Lower House) as a whole or media companies who produce but do not actively direct their media products into a soft power and/or national branding market.

directs soft power programmes, such as the Cool Japan Initiative, to generate economic investment in Japanese products – and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – which directs diplomatic and economic programs pertinent to national branding initiatives in order to generate investment in Japanese cultural products.

Primary to this is how Miyazaki has perceived – and reacted to – national branding[3] and soft power[4] policies as directed by programme enactors over the years, and more so in how Miyazaki's reactions to the use of branding and soft power programmes have been used to foist a constructed form of national and/or personal identity on the Japanese people, as well as how enforced identity construction was then projected upon the world stage. This analysis is coupled with a consideration of how Miyazaki's perception of national branding and soft power practices affected the themes and images of the two films explored in this thesis.

An Explanation of the Approach

Research began with a literature review of specific genres and tropes that are common in anime and manga (specifically the supernatural genre) and how they affect or can be affected by national branding/soft power efforts – measured by fan community responses and economic investment. This was done in order to quantify how audiences respond to specific genre products and if said audiences were more likely to invest in such media types because of the influence of the national branding and soft power practices that surround them. However, this was found to be far too broad a scope to cover, so it was pared down to various texts that were seen as the paradigms of their genre based on the opposing factors of (fan) consumer-producer relationships and investment in self branding away from the audience's cultural norms. Again, this proved too broad, so a more exacting focus was put on two films that epitomised the popularity of Japanese animated films but were dichotomously opposed in their themes and aesthetics. During this stage of research, certain trends in the literature became apparent. Specifically, a schism was noted between the corporate and/or governmental entities which desired to push an idealised discourse of Japan and Japanese

[3] How a nation creates a branded product based on an (invented) national identity or on a commercial or historical product – with *Hello Kitty* and *samurai* being primary examples, respectively, of products in these categories.

[4] The use of pop culture to increase favourable perceptions of a country.

people and the animation auteurs[5] who wished to illustrate the fragility of the modern Japanese psyche (Abel 2011).

This early stage of research raised the broad question: 'What if Japanese soft power and national branding has actually failed because of interference by other parties (such as media creators or rival brand creators)?'. If this was the case, and was demonstrable through research, the next question became: 'Who dictates the use and direction of soft power and national branding?'. This leads in turn to: 'Is this something that programme enactors and investors can dictate to the consumer base?'. These questions became the first stage of the more focussed research that would form this thesis as a whole, which was done by reflecting upon and reviewing these questions in order to hone them into a piercing argument.

The process of reflection and review led to the idea that maybe the form of (national) branding envisioned by Japanese programme enactors and investors could be actively subverted by individuals using tools that gave them wide public exposure. If this was possible, who could best embody this idea and ability? This led to an investigation of some of the most popular anime auteurs − including Satoshi Kon (*Perfect Blue*) and Mamoru Oshii (*Ghost In The Shell*) − but it was ultimately decided that Hayao Miyazaki best embodied the form of subversion that only a widely successful auteur could produce. If this hypothesis was in some way correct, one must investigate what, if any, political and/or social factors caused Miyazaki to become an agent of subversion, which, in turn, helped to form the research question 'How did Miyazaki's response to Japanese governmental influences upon national branding and soft power affect his films?'.

Why Miyazaki?

If you were to ask media studies academics, critics or pop culture consumers: 'Who is the first person that you think of when you think of Japanese animation?' more often than not their answer would be 'Hayao Miyazaki'.

Miyazaki bestrides the world of film and animation, garnering such titles as 'The godfather of

[5] Auteurs, according to Thompson and Bordwell (2010), are directors who invest their films with a 'personal vision' and disregard the wishes and influences of investors and other entities who would affect creative control on a film's production, usually by marking their films with a signature style or appearance.

anime' and 'the Walt Disney of the East'. Yet McCarthy (2002) and Napier (2010) say that Miyazaki himself actually rejects such titles, claiming that they are meaningless when weighed against the work of others. Condry (2013) argues that Miyazaki's works are among the strongest drivers of global consumption of Japanese media, which in turn allows for a greater awareness of, and desire for, other Japanese media/cultural products in both local and international audiences.

In terms of his economic importance, publications such as the *Economist* (2013) and authors such as Lim (2014) cite figures that Miyazaki – and his production house, Studio Ghibli – are worth millions of US dollars per year to the Japanese economy, not only in terms of film revenue but also in financial investments in Japanese commercial and media products. Denison (2010) and Norris (2013) argue that entire tourist industries have flourished around Miyazaki and the Studio Ghibli brand, not least represented in visits to the studio itself, based in Mikata (West Tokyo) – which, Denison claims, generates extensive local and international tourism revenue for the region. To cement Miyazaki's importance to the Japanese economy, Barber (2014) cites Japanese sources which reported that Miyazaki's statement that he would retire 'sent the Japanese stock market into a brief tailspin as investors became unsure of the ramifications of this announcement'.

In terms of critical and cultural reception, Napier (2010) argues that few other Japanese animators or directors have had a greater impact on media than Miyazaki. He has won dozens of awards and he was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2015 Oscars. Barber (2014) states that every production he has been involved with as director, writer or producer has generated exceptional audience anticipation as well as demand for associated merchandise – such as art books and toys. Lim (2013) also argues that many Japanese people base their self-identity around the Miyazaki films they grew up with, and that this is used as a form of cross-generational connection, as parents share their love of Miyazaki with their children.

However, for all these accolades and affirmations, can it be said, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed, that 'what Miyazaki does is for the good of Japan' (Ashcraft 2014)? That is, does Miyazaki aim to transform Japan into a place that national and global audiences

willingly choose to emulate, invest in and acquire from? According to Napier (2010) and McCurry (2013), Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli have a palpable effect not only on the Japanese economy but also on society in terms of individuals' projected moral and/or material branded identities. According to McCurry (2013), people often brand themselves according to which Miyazaki (Studio Ghibli) film they most identify with. Condry (2013) states that the release of each Miyazaki film was lauded by audiences and closely observed by economists because of the box office records that Miyazaki continually broke. As Miyazaki's popularity grew, several international companies competed to secure global distribution, with the Disney Corporation, through their (then) subsidiary Miramax, winning the rights to the global sale and marketing of Studio Ghibli films (McCarthy 2002). With global sales of Miyazaki's work extending into the millions of dollars, Napier (2007, 2010) affirms that Miyazaki is vitally important to Japan on many social and economic levels. Yet Miyazaki himself (2009, 2014) contends that he does not make films for profit nor for the glorification of a Japanese ideal; instead he makes films in order to fulfil an internal need to be creative and in order both to entertain and to educate his audience. Miyazaki (2009, 2014) claims that the benefits to Japan's ongoing (self and national) branding and soft power efforts are a mere side effect of him accomplishing his own selfish desires.

The Rationale and Methodology for the Research

Operationally, this thesis seeks to establish a foothold within the discourses of branding and soft power and the discipline of Media Studies via a study of selected works by Miyazaki. This entails: a discussion of the various discourses surrounding Miyazaki as a person; a textual analysis of *Porco Rosso* (1992) and *Spirited Away* (2001); an interrogation of academic and journalistic texts on the topics of soft power and (national) branding, anime, Japanese society and studies of Miyazaki's filmography; and a review of Miyazaki's own words sourced from diaries, interviews and lectures.

To answer the research question 'How did Miyazaki's response to Japanese governmental influences upon national branding and soft power affect his films?' this thesis examines ideas around branding and soft power as well as how Miyazaki used his works to challenge and subvert the ideologies of various programme enactors and investors.

Methodologically, this is done through a literature review and a textual study and appraisal of the aforementioned films, which entails comparing and contrasting the films and accompanying academic texts with the social discourses of the time. A brief examination of Miyazaki's general filmography with reference to his other works and personal writings to illustrate his views of his perceived ideologies is also undertaken. Also required was a critical examination of what academics like Napier (2001, 2006, 2007, 2010) and Ayumi (2009) view as Miyazaki's primary themes and concerns, as well as the meta-themes that are considered universal throughout his filmography. These observations are tempered against discourses on Miyazaki's work and legacy, running in parallel with the discussions of the evolving practices and ideologies of the various programme enactors and investors.

Why these two films?

With a body of work spanning more than 30 years, Miyazaki's films reflect many social, historical and cultural shifts. The period referred to by economists such as Paul Krugman (2009) as The Lost Decade (*Ushinawareta Jūnen* in Japanese sources), which spanned from 1991 to 2002 and encompassed the collapse and reconstruction of the Japanese economy, is the one focussed on throughout the analyses of *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away*, because these films were produced at either end of that economic era.

Media and cultural academics consider The Lost Decade important because of the way in which it aligns with a shifting view of how Japan branded itself in the media it produced. This period coincided with an economic boom in Japanese pop culture industries that was, according to Condry (2013), due to the rise of new technologies that allowed animation to be produced more quickly and more cheaply. Also coinciding with The Lost Decade, Clammer (2012) argues, was the loss of social confidence and sense of national and personal identity that occurred when Japan's Economic Bubble burst in the early 1990s. Slater and Galbraith (2011) claim that the instability associated with the bursting of the Bubble, coupled with devastating natural disasters like the Great Hanshin Earthquake[6] of 1995, so fractured the Japanese psyche and their sense of socio-economic superiority that many Japanese lost their sense of self and purpose. Slater and Galbraith (2011) postulate that this culmination of

[6] Also referred to as the Kobe Earthquake or *Hanshin Awaji Daishinsai* in Japanese.

events was reflected in the extremities of anime of the period – either being extremely sexualised and/or violent or extremely cute and/or socially benign. Yet, Slater and Galbraith (2011) contend, these productions were imbued with a sense that Japanese culture and identity were things that could not be criticised by outsiders; an attempt to regain even a semblance of national confidence. Furthermore, these productions were designed so that they could not be accused of being hypocritical in calling themselves culturally exclusive in spite of their pilfering widely from foreign sources (Valaskivi 2013).

Napier (2006, 2010) argues that Miyazaki's three major films of the period – *Porco Rosso*, *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Spirited Away* – were made as a response to attempts of branding through the use of media products. The focus on the films from the beginning and end of the Lost Decade in this thesis is intended to highlight not only the shifting political/economic efforts of Japan in that era, but also Miyazaki's response to them. These films also illustrate the aforementioned importance that Miyazaki had in restoring national confidence and helping to boost a media-led socio-economic resurgence. Napier (2010) contends that Miyazaki played this role through the success of his films, which broke Japanese box office records and beat many foreign blockbusters to do so, something which Clammer (2012) affirms was a boon to the reconstruction of the shattered Japanese economy and psyche.

Definitions

Soft Power, National Branding and Cool Japan

As used in this thesis, soft power has a twofold meaning. In standard use, soft power, as defined by Joseph S. Nye Jr. (1990:154) is 'the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes you want' through the use of cultural tropes, products, ideology and philosophy without resorting to the use of economic or military force. In terms of Japanese soft power, Lam (2007:353) notes 'the use of manga and anime as novel instruments of global outreach and appeal', products which are considered the epitome of modern Japanese media and cultural products. Decatur (2012) argues that this is exemplified by the global

consumption of culturally ambiguous products such as Hello Kitty, a *kawaii*[7] cat that has penetrated every form of media and material product imaginable. The second use of the term soft power is related to national branding, as cited by Abel (2011) and Valaskivi (2013), that is directed both at domestic Japanese consumers, in order to reinforce perceived cultural habits, and outwardly at the rest of the world, in order to project a facade of cultural consensus (as depicted in media products such as anime).

According to True (2006), national (or nation) branding is the act of a country/government projecting an air of confidence or promoting themselves as a desirable location globally in order to attract interest in local tourism, commercial and/or cultural products and economic investment from foreign nations/corporations. National branding is usually done in conjunction with soft power strategies and is used to promote either an embodied philosophy – like the USA's supposed socio-economic freedoms – or a culturally specific product – like manga and anime.

The Cool Japan programme is an extension of the Japanese government's national branding policy that promotes all Japanese products – media, cultural, historical and material – as more desirable because they are associated with the cultural otherness of Japan (Valaskivi 2013); these products also carry a visual narrative or constructed uniqueness that can only be found in Japanese products. Cool Japan is also used to present Japan as a nation and culture that is different from any other and is therefore immune to criticism according to the social, moral, historical or political standards of other nations. This has recently been observed by political and social commentators, such as Iwabuchi (2010), as part of the attempt by the Japanese government to deflect criticism of their current policy mistakes and various atrocities committed by past governments – such as the war crimes committed in China and Korea during World War II.

Aim, Research Tasks and Structure of the Thesis

As stated above, this thesis aims to answer the focussing question: From an examination of *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away*, how did Miyazaki's response to Japanese governmental

[7] Translates as "cute" but also implies a desire to possess and protect.

influences upon national branding and soft power affect his films? The three research tasks undertaken to answer this question are covered in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: *The Branding of Power* clarifies the core concepts that underpin the focus of the thesis, namely: soft power, national branding and Cool Japan. A key thrust of this chapter is to establish the broad historical and social context in which these policies operate.

Chapter 3: *The Man Miyazaki* contains an examination of Hayao Miyazaki himself through his filmography. It also explores the meta-themes within his works and their relationships to national branding and soft power. Additionally, it examines how he uses his various works to set up challenges against the diverse suite of programme enactors and investors.

Chapters 4 and **5** collectively address the third task area and involve a textual analysis of *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away*, examining how each film addressed and subverted the policies of its time. These two chapters address each film's reactions to the various policies and ideologies by exploring their themes and imagery, comparing them against academic discourse and critical response.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion, which synthesises the three tasks to provide a final answer to this thesis' question, as well as incorporating ideas for future studies and research into Miyazaki, his film legacy and his relationship with soft power.

When this thesis began it was with an intention to explore reactions to an entire genre of anime and its relationship with national branding and soft power efforts, yet that was considered too broad a topic to cover in this format. Through honing the core ideas surrounding discourses, a very simple question emerged and influenced the direction of the research. That question being: how does an auteur like Hayao Miyazaki demonstrate his subversion of national branding and soft power? With this driving force, the research gained clarity and focus and its aim became to demonstrate how Miyazaki reacted to and challenged the agendas of the various programme enactors and investors working on national branding and soft power policies in Japan. The following chapters bring forth this hypothesis by establishing context, exploring Miyazaki himself and analysing two of his films, to support

the argument that Miyazaki's work has a function as a reaction to, and criticism of, the various national branding and soft power programmes of the past few decades.

CHAPTER 2

The Branding of Power

Review of the Literature and Key Concepts

> We are now living in a society that is wealthy yet poverty-stricken. We are able to listen to a large amount of music and watch a large number of videos. But only a small fraction of these move us. If you think about it a bit, I suspect you will agree with me.
>
> Miyazaki (2009:51)

The purpose of the following chapter is to contextualise the definitions of national branding and soft power, revealing their histories, some of their strengths and weaknesses, and identifying many of the key national branding policies and ideologies – including the Cool Japan programme. References to the relationship between these policies and the works of Miyazaki are also included.

Soft Power

Pop Culture Diplomacy

The term soft power is often described in lay terms as a form of diplomacy through popular (pop) culture, usually through media or desirable/aspirational consumer products, as opposed to economic enforcement through sanctions or demonstrations of military might that are the core of Hard Power (Nye 2008).

The term 'soft power' was coined by the political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr. in his seminal 1990 essay *Soft Power*. Nye (1990:154) states that soft power is based on 'the factors of technology, education and economic growth' and 'the ability to influence what others want, are prepared to do and what they want to copy from you'.

Iwabuchi (2002, 2010) and Miller (2011) argue that the majority of Japanese soft power products occupy spaces that are either defined as 'ambiguous' – those that can be consumed by a mass audience without the weight of cultural connotations affecting possible consumer bias – or 'niche' – focussed on a very specific branded market or group who wish to use such products to enforce their socio-economic identity. Miller (2011) and Decatur (2012) contend that ambiguity is found in such media and merchandising products as the *Hello Kitty* brand, which stretches beyond simple animated forms to an extensive range of products, many of which are unrelated to the character. Decatur (2012) argues *Hello Kitty*, and other *kawaii* products, have been at the forefront of Japanese soft power endeavours because they bring no cultural baggage to their usages or appearance, meaning that any inherent Japaneseness is quickly overlooked as part of a stronger self-identity branding–through-product drive. Iwabuchi (2010) states that this is important to national branding because it creates a bridging point, allowing consumers to identify Japanese products through aesthetic (visual) markers rather than cultural ones. Instead, as Valaskivi (2013) states, these aesthetic forms *became* the cultural markers that represented Japan post-1980s, with the traits of anime design – such as large eyes and feminine cuteness mixed with exaggerated sexualisation of the female form – becoming the centre of what the fan-consumer base sought out. Blended with this, Park (2005) and Lam (2007) contend that more niche media products – such as particular genres or aesthetic forms – invoke a great sense of audience engagement. Lam (2007) states that this is because the fan-consumer base invests more heavily – both emotionally and financially – in niche or unique media products because they allow access to a sense of cultural exclusivity. This forms part of a self-branding centred on the 'Cultural Otherness' of anime (and other Japanese media products such as manga and video games), in which groups or individuals take on the supposed habits of another culture based solely upon their media representations. Lam (2007) states this is a key driver of both soft power and national branding because it encourages consumers to make a personal and financial investment in a cultural product in order to rebrand themselves away from their cultural or social norms and/or identities in favour of the (invented) identity of another country or culture as depicted in various media products. This, as Park (2005) and Napier (2007) argue, parallels other forms of heavily invested fandom, the members of which transform their cultural and social identities through media products such as *Harry Potter* or *Star Trek* because doing so both creates something unique (different) that is apart from the social norm but also allows for a sense of connection

with other, similarly invested fans.

Because soft power and national branding must work with and influence popular perceptions and misconceptions as well as the ever-evolving nature of pop culture, such programmes are often seen to be in a state of flux. Iwabuchi (2002, 2010) and Otmazgin (2012) highlight this by showing that the form of pop culture that Japanese soft power programme investors are presenting to the world has shifted from relatively expensive television and film productions to more disposable forms of pop music in order to gain greater market penetration, especially within Asia, where there is an increased demand for easily consumed pop culture products due to the rapid rise of an upwardly mobile middle-class in countries such as China. Regarding this, Iwabuchi (2010) and Stevens (2010) have shown how rival international media investors/producers (mainly from China and Korea) are becoming more interested in appropriating Japanese aesthetics to fuel their own soft power and branding programmes.

A brief history of Japanese Soft Power

In reference to the early stages of the Japanese soft power agenda, Iwabuchi (2002:450) cites a term coined by Morley and Robins (1995): 'techno-Orientalism'. The phrase itself, according to Iwabuchi's (2002) usage, denotes an implicit racism, as well as an expectation of an otherworldliness that, as LaFeber (1997) states, is usually associated with anything of Oriental or Far Eastern origin. Iwabuchi (2002) argues that this term brings an anticipation of enhanced value because of the aesthetic uniqueness of Eastern products. Iwabuchi (2002) uses the term 'techno-Orientalism' to characterise the desirability of Japanese products in the global market, which was for a long time based on electronic consumer goods of high aesthetic and manufacturing quality. Iwabuchi (2002, 2010) also uses the term to describe what the global market expected of Japanese products. Yet, as Lam (2007) shows, this meant that other countries were not receptive to early Japanese soft power practices but that the market expected products, not culture, to be the driving force of Japan's exports. Kelts (2006) and MacWilliams (2006) highlight this by drawing attention to the American practice of localisation of Japanese media to give them a North American context in terms of the social normatives of race, religion and cultural references, so as not to offend any American sensibilities or create cultural confusion, as well as to avoid any racism that might be projected against the media products in question because of their Asian origin.

Iwabuchi (2010) argues that the best way soft power programme investors could counter this stripping away of cultural context was not to produce works based exclusively upon Japanese culture, history and lifestyle, but instead to increase the inherent desirability of Japanese media and commercial products by presenting them as being aesthetically and technologically superior to their Western counterparts. This led to a form of 'national exceptionalism and elitism' where the Japanese 'held themselves as above their international rivals in terms of technology and sold the nation along those lines' (Valaskivi 2013:8). Unfortunately, as Stevens (2010) and Valaskivi (2013) both point out, as the Japanese economy began to falter under corporate and governmental mismanagement, many programme investors sought to abandon their costly international expansion campaigns. Instead both the programme enactors and investors were forced to turn their attention inwards, producing national campaigns based on 'homogenised nostalgia' to regain national consumer confidence in order to boost failing markets (Valaskivi 2013:9) using 'the imagery of cultural clichés, such as geisha, samurai and Mt Fuji' to appeal to a sense of cultural nostalgia for better, more secure times as well as to draw in foreign tourists and investors (Valaskivi 2013:9).

The 1990s, Valaskivi (2013) argues, saw the beginning of true Japanese soft power policies, designed to alter perceptions of the country – perceptions that were usually generated by Hollywood stereotypes. Yet, the 1990s also saw the first stages of the collapse of the juggernaut that was the Japanese economy. This sputtering market halted many branding and soft power initiatives, and also fractured much of Japan's social confidence in its national and economic superiority. It was this growing atmosphere of socio-economic uncertainty that led to Japan 'losing the initiative on the global stage due to their innate conservatism' (Iwabuchi 2002:446-7). Stevens (2010) argues that, to this end, programme investors attempted to push more of their media products onto the international market in a two-pronged approach. The first method was the wholesale release of various animated products to Western distributers with the promise that they could be altered so that they would better appeal to a foreign audience, removing any Japanese cultural or referential baggage – such as the hierarchical social structure, religious practices and the differences in sexual and gender roles. The second approach, according to Valaskivi (2013:9), was to produce and sell what the programme

investors deemed to be more ‘culturally authentic’ material, represented particularly by feature films that could be sold at international film festivals to show the breadth of Japanese film culture. This approach, as Nygren (2007) highlights, included culturally controversial auteurs, such as Takeshi Kitano and Miike Takashi, in order to demonstrate the broad array of social discourses within Japan. Unfortunately the programme enactors had to align with the expectations of the film festival and art house audiences, who expected films that focussed on Japan as a quirky, mysterious place that were more popular with foreign audiences of the period.

Post 2000, when Japan was showing signs of economic recovery, the Japanese government implemented the Cool Japan Programme as part of its soft power efforts. This was, according to Abel (2011), intended to imbue Japanese products – be they media, cultural or consumer goods – with an inherent coolness because of their association with the so-called ‘otherness’ of Japan. Yet, according to Iwabuchi (2010), many aspects of Japanese soft power were hindered by heavy criticism and scrutiny from economic rivals such as China and Korea that wished to engage in their own national branding and soft power programmes, programmes which, according to Otmazgin (2012), were and are often enacted via the appropriation of many of Japan’s pop culture constructions – such as music or visual media – by taking their aesthetic styles and adapting them into forms that are nearly identical yet imbued with local cultural markers. This direct appropriation of non-cultural (historical) pop cultural aesthetics and constructions meant that the market was burdened with choice, which in turn meant that Japanese enactors and investors must constantly adjust to new fan-consumer expectations, hindering programme progress. Further, Iwabuchi (2002, 2010) and Lam (2007) argue that it was also the inflexibility of successive governments in addressing various historical and social issues – such as Japan’s whaling programme or bids to strengthen the Self Defence Force (SDF) – that hampered many of the country’s soft power efforts. Valaskivi (2013), on the other hand, contends that it was the constant shifting in policy in order to paper over national issues, such as the Tōhoku Earthquake of March 2011 and the ensuing Fukushima nuclear power plant incident, that disrupted programme implementation. Specifically, mass programme shifts were enacted in order to ‘save face’ with the public (voters) rather than to resolve actual issues of programme mismanagement or to address the disasters. Iwabuchi (2010) and Valaskivi (2013) maintain that these issues, as well as the rise of soft power

policies and products from countries such as Korea, have hamstrung many of Japan's initiatives to continue to promote its soft power and Cool Japan programmes on a greater scale.

National Branding and Cool Japan:

How Cool Is Now?

Jin (2010) and Otmazgin (2012) argue that once a nation reaches a certain level of socio-economic status it will usually begin a three pronged national branding strategy. The first prong, according to Otmazgin (2012), is a tourist campaign designed to strengthen certain sectors of the economy – such as the hospitality and entertainment industries – as well as to push the nation as a desirable location for foreign visitors and investors. The second prong is a concerted effort to broadcast an air of socio-economic confidence as well as a sense of superiority, that the country in question has a greater level of cultural and economic affluence than other nations (Jin 2010). The third prong is an internal campaign to help boost confidence, both in terms of economics and soft nationalism, as well as to help push an image of confidence and unity within the nation to any foreign tourists or investors (Abel 2011).

Dinnie (2008) and Jin (2010) argue that Japan's early national branding efforts first began in earnest in the late 1970s, when the country saw a great surge in economic confidence. While Japan offered an exceptionally lacklustre tourist programme, the Japanese government and corporations realised there was an opportunity for the nation to gain a stronger market share by creating a new national branding initiative (Dinnie 2008). This initiative originally centred on the creation and marketing of exciting new consumer goods, the prestige of which was to be their branding as a 'product of Japan' (Iwabuchi 2010); the Sony Walkman, for example, was designed to be a hallmark of Japanese efficiency and ingenuity, giving a focus to the early national branding campaigns surrounding Japanese technological superiority (Iwabuchi 2010; du Gay et al 2013). According to Miller (2011), this cultural branding initiative was augmented through the distribution of merchandise that was both culturally ubiquitous yet intrinsically Japanese in terms of quality and (aesthetic) design. Decatur (2012) contends that the most effective (cultural) merchandising export from Japan has been *Hello Kitty*, yet Jin (2010) argues that if it were not for early media exports, such as translated or re-edited anime

series, other Japanese cultural and media products would not have gained such a firm foothold in Western markets. Jin (2010) further argues that it was the growing demand for Japanese media products and merchandise that produced new national branding campaigns for the various Japanese programme investors, the most current of which is the Cool Japan branding campaign.

Douglas McGray (2002) first wrote about the emergence of the rebranding of Japanese pop and cultural products and industries in his article 'Japan's Gross National Cool', stating that he saw this as part of the initiative to transform Japan into a 'cultural superpower that rivals the United States'. McGray (2002) also picked up comments from former Prime Minister of Japan Taro Aso, a self-confessed anime otaku[8], on reinvigorating Japan's media and pop culture industries so they could compete in the growing global market. Part of this initiative, according to Valaskivi (2013), was to encourage foreign media producers into Japan through artist awards, as well as using so-called 'pop culture ambassadors' – including anime characters like Astro Boy and Doraemon. According to the BBC (2004), these initiatives led Japan's Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of the Economy, Trade and Industry to enact policies and programmes focussed on establishing Japan's 'gross national cool'. This created what was called by many in the government and media as simply 'Cool Japan'. Superficially, Cool Japan was based on the UK's Cool Britannia campaign of the 1990s, which, according to McGuire (1996, 2009), attempted to imbue British cultural products – especially pop music – with an inherent coolness simply by being British. Valaskivi (2013) emphasises that with Cool Japan, and through the Cool Japan Advisory Council (CJAC), the Japanese Government had moved to become one of the primary enactors in the nation's national branding programmes. This was done in order to 'push Japan's cultural and commercial capital and influence throughout the rest of the world' (Valaskivi 2013:3). Further, Valaskivi (2013:6) adds that 'through changing practices and circulation, a nation brand becomes much more than marketing measures directed towards other countries'. That is to say, Cool Japan became less about external promotion and more about 'the construction of national identity', a process in which 'the nation becomes analogous with corporations' (Valaskivi 2013:6).

[8] Originally meaning a person who has an obsessive or intense interest in a specific subject; otaku has now come to refer to any obsessive consumer of media and by-product of media, including apparel, toys and music.

With this focus, the Cool Japan programme had shifted its focus from selling the inherent coolness of Japanese media products and merchandising to international markets and was instead promoting the coolness of Japan to a domestic market through otaku culture – which in and of itself has undergone a form of rebranding from a previously negative social image.

Otaku culture, according to the Yano Research Institute (2012), contributes over 20 billion US Dollars per year to the Japanese economy, yet has many negative cultural connotations due to its association with serial killer Tsutomu Miyazaki[9] and stereotypes of social isolation, obsessive behaviour and detachment from reality. Yet this refocusing on otaku culture, writes Valaskivi (2013), was intended to target a heavily emotionally and financially invested audience who had already branded their identities with media and corporate products. Condry (2013) insists that this rebranding of Japanese otaku was designed to ripple out to a global otaku audience in order to capitalise on the same financial and emotional investment that the domestic otaku audience had displayed. Valaskivi (2013) suggests that otaku culture became central to the Cool Japan programme because it offered a stable financial base which the programme enactors and investors could build upon in order to increase its market penetration. Valaskivi (2013) argues that by using the invested otaku audience as a lynchpin of the Cool Japan programme, enactors and investors could use these otaku as both gatekeepers and bellwethers for what is considered to be 'cool', thus being able to refocus their message and products according to any shifts in, or demands from, the fan-consumer base.

Despite this new otaku-oriented branding, the programme enactors and investors still wished to imbue the Cool Japan programme with '*kompanteki na konkan*' (lit. 'essential Japanese values') (Valaskivi 2013:13), meaning that the internal branding of Cool Japan and other national branding programmes was invested with a notion of who and what the Japanese people should be and how they should present themselves to the rest of the world. Lam (2007) and Valaskivi (2013) contend that this blending of a rebellious form of cool with government ideology became both a push and a drag on the evolving Cool Japan programme.

[9] Tsutomu Miyazaki gained infamy as a cannibalistic serial killer and paedophilic necrophile who murdered and dismembered four young girls between 1988 and 1989. His connection to *otaku* culture comes from the media promoting a causal link between his anime collection and the murders that he committed. The media then fuelled a moral panic against anime and *otaku* in general, inferring that *otaku*, who frequently dwell on the fringes of society, are all potential murders and/or paedophiles due to their obsessive hobby..

Valaskivi (2013) further adds that by imbuing Cool Japan with social ideology, the programme enactors had transformed Cool Japan from a simple product branding initiative into an ideological programme, putting a strain on the relationship with the programme investors — who simply wished to push their products and not social policy.

The Miyazaki Brand

Few would argue the importance of Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli to Japan's global efforts to project a National Brand through media products. This importance was probably most clearly demonstrated when Miyazaki announced his retirement from feature film production in 2013. This, according to Akagawa (2013), forced the Japanese government to issue a statement on how this affected their national branding efforts – especially the Cool Japan programme – with the intention of persuading investors that things would carry on as before. Miyazaki's retirement generated a genuine fear in many of the branding and soft power programme investors, as well, possibly, as a negative impact on the Japanese stock market in the form of potentially reduced media and mechanising sales (Barber 2014). A statement from the Ministry of the Economy, Trade and Industry said that the Ministry would have to evaluate the potential impacts of this event upon Japan's national branding and soft power programmes, especially in regards to the release of Miyazaki's final film, *The Wind Rises*, and its negative reception in the US and Asia due to its controversial subject matter [see **Chapter 3**] (McCurry 2013). Napier (2006) and Condry (2013) report previous attempts by the Japanese Government and media producers – mainly the international Disney Corporation – to use Miyazaki to push media-merchandise sales, and highlight various promotional policies based on the aesthetics Miyazaki creates. Denison (2010) contends that Miyazaki (and Studio Ghibli) injected millions of dollars a year into the Japanese economy, not only through sales of associated products, but also through foreign tourism to Japan on the basis of a connection felt to the country through Miyazaki's work. Denison (2010) further argues that various programme investors, including other media production houses, have used the prestige that the Miyazaki-Studio Ghibli brand possesses in the West to generate interest in a wider range of Japanese media products. This is generally achieved through pairing a Miyazaki film with another cinematic release at international film festivals to draw maximum attention to Japanese media and associated media products (merchandise) as a whole.

Yet, while programme investors seek to take advantage of Miyazaki's brand and international prestige, he himself does not seek to make this a symbiotic relationship. Miyazaki is fully cognisant of the nature of media marketing as well as of corporate sponsorship and its importance to making any film successful. However, in Mani Sunada's 2013 documentary *Yume to Kyōki no Ōkoku*[10], when asked why he had never signed up to any of the Japanese government's major national branding or soft Power programmes, Miyazaki replies: 'I just make films. I don't care who watches them or why. I just make films as well as I can and hope that my audience likes them as well. As long as they do, I'm happy'.

Sunada (2013) notes that this blasé attitude to branded marketing has almost become a double-edged sword for Miyazaki; while his name alone attached to a project is enough to generate global interest and discussion across the news media, Miyazaki does not seek to use his name to co-opt prestige for himself. Sunada (2013) notes that this has not yet happened in any negative sense; however, it does potentially diminish the scale at which Miyazaki's messages can first be brought to public attention. Such a negative co-opting of prestige may potentially occur through various marketing strategies which emphasise the importance of a homogenised Japanese socio-media landscape over an auteur's subtle depictions of a myriad of social issues to which a retired Miyazaki can no longer respond. For his own part, Miyazaki believes that both his and Studio Ghibli's brand will one day fade into obscurity. As he says in *Yume to Kyōki no Ōkoku* (2013): 'Ghibli is a random name that I got from an aeroplane. It's only a name'. He then concludes: 'If the name made people happy, then that is a good thing. That's the only thing that matters really. How happy you are, not what made you happy'. Even with such an attitude, Miyazaki's importance to the continuing national branding and soft power efforts of Japan cannot be stressed strongly enough. His retirement made national news and the false reports of the closure of Studio Ghibli forced the Japanese government to make an official statement on the matter to the foreign press to reassure both Japanese and foreign programme investors.

Conclusion

Japan's soft power and national branding initiatives have had to adapt to ever-changing

[10] *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*

domestic and international issues, including economic and natural disasters, as well as negative international perceptions. Notwithstanding, these initiatives aim to place Japanese products – be they cultural, historical, media or consumer – in a realm of unique exclusivity and superior quality. Valaskivi (2013) believes that these programs have largely been successful in promoting Japanese culture and products as being inherently cool, yet also feels that they have not been without their faults. Iwabuchi (2002) and Miller (2011) contend that many of Japan's soft power and national branding products have been stripped of cultural context in favour of a quirky or aesthetic uniqueness that plays to foreign expectations of Japan being a techno-Oriental society possessing qualities of the alien (foreign) other. Miller (2011) further argues that Japan, in setting up these expectations, has weakened many of its national branding initiatives because, as a result of their limited experiences of the Japanese mediascape, foreign audiences now often see Japan as a bizarre place filled with disturbing cultural practices and sexual perversions. In contrast, Lam (2007) and Paulk (2011) propose that it is this uniqueness that helps to push the notion of Cool Japan in both the domestic and international consumer psyche, giving it a tangible sense of desirability that exceeds the quality of non-Japanese media and commercial products.

It is the uniqueness – both culturally and aesthetically – projected by Japanese products that makes them so desirable, domestically and internationally. According to Kelts (2006) and Condry (2013), the inimitable aesthetic of anime has proven to be a major factor in the desire to be associated with it and its related merchandise. As Lam (2007) and Denison (2008) argue, anime and its associated products form a central core to the desirability of Japan as a tourist destination and as a producer of media/consumer products in the minds of foreign audiences. Kelts (2006) and Napier (2007) suggest that this is because of the myriad narrative and visual forms that anime can depict, which are, in the perceptions of fan-consumers, beyond those found in Western equivalents. Primarily, it is anime's lack of constraint to limited audience groups (based on age, gender and/or economic affluence) that makes it more globally popular than brand-focussed Western animations. With such aesthetic and narrative uniqueness, even when mired in cultural ambiguity, Napier (2007) and Valaskivi (2013) agree that it is anime that stands as the single greatest export of Japanese pop culture, national branding and soft power. This is, Lam (2007) suggests, because even though its aesthetic can be appropriated by foreign media producers, they can never replicate its true visual and

storytelling uniqueness, thus making such aesthetics desirable, because of their branding of exclusivity based on both culture and technology. Iwabuchi (2002, 2010) and Valaskivi (2013) argue that these factors are the lynchpins of Japanese national branding and soft power.

Yet, reflected against this, Napier (2010) claims, Miyazaki positions his works not to capitalise on any notions of technical superiority or cultural otherness, but rather wishes to tell almost universal narratives through the medium of Japanese animation. His unique visual style is a cultural product more than it is something cultivated by the market in order to generate interest and revenue. Instead, Miyazaki's works are almost an antithesis to such market-driven production practises – his films exist through a desire to share a story rather than merely sell a product – be it Japanese media or Japan itself. This attitude of standing aside from the majority of national branding and soft power programme efforts grants Miyazaki a form of freedom to produce the films that he wants, without relying on a narrative that has been constructed by any other programme enactor or investor. This, in turn, means that Miyazaki often finds him unburdened by many of the negative ideologies, fashions and trends that tend to dominate much Japanese mainstream media as well as being free from many forms of political interference and pressure, allowing him to embrace and play with the more positive media and social aspects of Japan. This, in turn, sets up the first stages of Miyazaki's subversion of programme enactors and investors, allowing him to express his own thoughts and ideologies in the hope that he may, in some way, influence the world in some constructive way.

CHAPTER 3

The Man Miyazaki

> If I were asked to give my view, in a nutshell, of what animation is, I would say it is "whatever I want to create". The world of animation is wide, and it includes not only animated series for television, but also commercials, experimental films, and theatrical features. But no matter what others may say, if it isn't something I really want to work on, it isn't animation to me.
>
> Miyazaki (2009:17)

This chapter examines Hayao Miyazaki as an individual, reflecting on his personal history and his time as an auteur. It also reflects upon some of the people and ideas that have influenced him throughout his career. This chapter begins with an exploration of Miyazaki's life and career, highlighting important moments and how they would come to affect his eventual film productions. Next the people, works and ideas that have influenced Miyazaki are discussed, before the themes and meta-themes[11] of his filmography are considered. Lastly, this chapter looks at the various ideologies that Miyazaki works against and which are in turn worked upon him, explaining how Miyazaki has been subsumed into national branding efforts, as well as how foreign media producers have sought to alter and control his work and themes.

Sketches of His Life and Career

Hayao Miyazaki was born in 1941, the son of Katsuji Miyazaki who was the director of Miyazaki Aeroplane – a company that made parts for the Japanese military. Miyazaki (2009) claims that it was this environment that lead to his lifelong love of aeroplanes and other complex machinery, having grown up looking at technical diagrams and schematics.

[11] Themes and images that are part of an overarching form through all of Miyazaki's works; also known as a Style or Signature (Brodwell 2008).

McCarthy (2002) states Miyazaki was able to live out the early period of the war in relative comfort because of his family's affluence and military connections. Miyazaki (2009) says that all changed when he witnessed the firebombing of Utsunomiya in Tochigi Prefecture in 1945. This event had such a profound impact upon Miyazaki's young psyche that it eventually led to the creation of the apocalyptic war scenes featured in many of his early films – such as *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984). McCarthy (2002) goes on to contend that the other event that greatly affected him during the firebombing of Utsunomiya was his family's abandonment of people fleeing the conflagration. During a lecture, Miyazaki (2014) said that it was this treatment of his fellow human beings by those in positions of power and affluence that gave him the resolve to become a compassionate individual who speaks out against injustice and hatred, a theme that Napier (2001, 2006) and Cavallaro (2006) claim pervades not only his films but his daily life as well through his advocacy of gender and racial equality in Japan.

Cavallaro (2006) suggests that in his early teens, Miyazaki's single greatest influence was the so called 'godfather of manga', Osamu Tezuka – the auteur most famous for creating the manga and anime series *Astro Boy* (1952), *Kimba The White Lion* (1950) and *Black Jack* (1973). From that point on, according to McCarthy (2002), Miyazaki focussed all of his energy into becoming a manga artist like the man he respected so much. Unfortunately, Miyazaki grew frustrated with his art and destroyed all of his early works, calling them 'a poor copy of Tezuka' (Cavallaro 2006:30). As McCarthy (2002) cites, from Miyazaki's own words, he still wanted to be creative but was at a loss as to what to do, falling into a pit of frustration and self-recrimination at what he perceived to be hollow art. That was until he saw the animated feature *Hakujaden*[12] (1958), which made him fall in love with both the heroine of the film and animation in general. This awakening to a new medium caused Miyazaki to reflect upon his own work, as McCarthy notes (2002:29): 'He realised the folly of trying to succeed as a manga writer by echoing what was fashionable, and decided to follow his true feelings in his work even if that might seem foolish'. Miyazaki returned to manga, this time focussing on his own unique visual and narrative styles rather than merely copying Tezuka or any other artist of the period.

[12] *Tale of the White Serpent*

After graduating from university in 1963, with degrees in political science and economics, Miyazaki began working at Toei Animation as an in-between[13] artist. Miyazaki's political science degree came into play: while working at the studio he headed a labour dispute over pay and conditions, eventually becoming the chief secretary of Toei's labour union (McCarthy 2002). He was also not a man to keep quiet in his work, challenging his seniors and directors if he did not agree with them – something that is viewed negatively in the strictly hierarchical structure of the Japanese workplace. According to McCarthy (2002), Miyazaki gained attention while working on the animated feature *Gulliver's Travels Beyond the Moon* (1965). During the production, he disputed the scripted ending for the series, reportedly arguing that it was unsatisfactory for the audience. He pitched his own ending, which was accepted by the film's producers, Hiroshi Okawa and Akira Onozaki, on the condition that he storyboard the ending himself. According to McCarthy (2002), the series gained critical and audience acclaim for its strong resolution, allowing Miyazaki to take credit for what could have potentially been a financial disaster for the studio.

Miyazaki's next major production was *Hols: Prince of the Sun* (1968), for which he was made chief animator, concept artist and scene designer. At the time, his mentor, Yasuo Otsuka, teamed Miyazaki up with an up-and-coming director by the name of Isao Takahata, a man who would become his life-long friend and eventual business partner. Miyazaki left Toei in 1971 with Takahata to work for A Pro Studio, co-directing the television adaptation of the adult manga *Lupin III*.[14] In 1972, Miyazaki and Takahata would collaborate again to try to adapt Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* – a project that both men had pushed hard for, even visiting Lindgren in Sweden to obtain her permission – but unfortunately it was cancelled after Lindgren refused to allow a Japanese studio to adapt any of her work. The two directors moved on to other projects together, enjoying several fruitful years before they left A Pro for Zuiyo Ezio studios (later renamed Nippon Animation) where Miyazaki would direct the televised anime *Future Boy Conan* (1978).

McCarthy (2002) argues that it was his work on *Future Boy Conan* that helped Miyazaki

[13] In-betweening is the process of generating intermediate frames between two images to give the appearance that the first image evolves smoothly into the second.

[14] Also marketed as *Lupin the 3rd*.

develop many of the unconventional meta-themes and archetypes that he would bring to his future productions. McCarthy (2002) and Napier (2006) note that these themes include: a young girl connected mentally and spiritually with nature; strong aggressive female characters who still possess a protective gentleness; the more natural development of affection between characters leading to love; and strangely designed aircraft and other forms of inimitable mechanisation.

In 1979, Miyazaki left Zuiyo Ezio/Nippon Animation, quitting in the middle of their adaption of *Anne of Green Gables*, to work for the TMS Entertainment subsidiary Telecom Animation Film. It was there that Miyazaki received his first feature film to direct on the basis of his positive history in the industry (McCarthy 2002). This film was an adaptation of *Lupin III*, entitled *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979), which was given to him primarily because of his previous experience on the television series. Miyazaki (2009) claimed that he was left disappointed with the industry after working on *The Castle of Cagliostro* because he was not allowed the freedom of expression he needed to create new and original ideas. He said that he no longer wanted to directly adapt other people's work, instead wishing to make stories that were truly unique in terms of their visual and narrative constructions. Although, Miyazaki (2014) has also said that he was grateful for being allowed to make *The Castle of Cagliostro* because it helped him understand many techniques for animating feature films, especially character movement, action scenes and how to project emotion with the minimum number of frames.

Miyazaki began to work on a number of side projects so he could hone his own visual and narrative style and, by 1984, he was able to produce his own feature film: *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* – which was adapted from his own manga series of the same name. McCarthy (2002) and Napier (2007) contend that it was the freedom granted on this project that allowed Miyazaki to begin to develop many of his primary themes and meta-themes, such as concern about environmental degradation at human hands, conflict and pacifism/pacificism,[15] and the use of technology for good and ill. Cavallaro (2006) further argues that *Nausicaä* also set up many of Miyazaki's main forms of characterisation,

[15] The general ethical opposition to war or violence, except in cases where force is deemed absolutely necessary to advance the cause of peace. Not to be confused with pacifism.

including a strong willed heroine willing to risk everything to save those she loves, multifaceted villains who can provoke feelings of sympathy and unease within the audience, wise elders and mentor figures, as well as well-rounded side characters who function as both comic relief and agents of narrative and physical action. In fact, Napier (2010) argues that the titular Nausicaä is one of the most important heroines in anime history because she not only possesses her own form of agency from the outset of the film but because she challenges all of the already established archetypes of female characters who until that point had, in all Japanese media, been prevalently weak and in constant need of masculine protection.

After the release of *Nausicaä*, Miyazaki and Takahata began to lay the foundations of what would become Studio Ghibli (McCarthy 2002; Cavallaro 2006). In 1985, Studio Ghibli officially opened and began work on Miyazaki's next big project, *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*[16] (1986), whilst Miyazaki supervised the beginning stages of Takahata's next personal project, *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988).

Over the next twelve years, Miyazaki would write, produce and direct seven short and feature length films, including: *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988) (writer/director), *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) (writer/director) and *Whisper of the Heart* (1995) (writer). In 1997, after the release of Studio Ghibli's most acclaimed and successful film to date, *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki announced a semi-retirement from directing due to the personal and physical toll the production had taken (McCarthy 2002).

However, this retirement was short-lived due to Miyazaki's excitement over a new idea that he had while spending time with some friends and their daughters (Napier 2006). Miyazaki (2001) said in an interview about the production of this new film: 'I wanted to make a film for girls where they are seen as real people overcoming problems with their own abilities. There aren't enough films like that in the world'. This production would become *Spirited Away* (2001), which still stands as Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli's most financially successful film to date [see **Chapter 5**].

Cavallaro (2006) and Fretwell (2012) contend that the success of *Spirited Away* triggered two

[16] Released as *Castle In The Sky* in North America.

important events. Firstly, it allowed Miyazaki to push through another pet project, which would become *Howl's Moving Castle*. Secondly, it forced many programme enactors and investors, including the Japanese government and the Disney Corporation (who had translated the film and released it internationally) to re-evaluate Miyazaki's cultural and financial importance; the latter, according to Fretwell (2012), basically forced the aforementioned programme investors to invest more heavily in the marketing and branding potential of both Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli for their own benefits [see **Miyazaki and Soft Power** in **Chapter 2**].

According to Cavallaro (2006) and Fretwell (2012), while *Howl's Moving Castle* proved very successful for Studio Ghibli, it had also taken its toll on Miyazaki's personal and professional lives. This was because Miyazaki had given up directing his long dreamt of project, an adaption of Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* fantasy series. Instead he gave the production to his son Goro Miyazaki who had never directed – or even worked on – an animation of any kind, having previously been a landscape designer. However, Takahata had asked him to design the storyboards before offering him the director's chair in hopes he would be equal to his father. Tensions over production caused Miyazaki and his son to stop speaking to each other, further hampering proceedings. *Tales From Earthsea* (2006) was released globally to mixed, though mainly poor, reviews, with critics such as David Stratton (2006) saying that 'it had the visuals of a Miyazaki film but very little of the heart that so draws people in'. Napier (2010) writes that Hayao Miyazaki did not take the lukewarm reception of the film very well, further straining his relationship with his son as well as adding to tensions around his next production.

Ponyo[17] was released in 2008 to strong critical acclaim, eventually winning several international and Japanese awards. Ross (2010) argues that it was the entirely hand drawn animation, inspired by impressionist artists like Monet and Van Gogh, mixed with touches of magical realism and a Wagnerian score that drew in audiences as much as the prestige of the Hayao Miyazaki name. Miyazaki did not direct for several years after *Ponyo* but repaired his relationship enough with his son Goro to work with him on the film *From Up on Poppy Hill* (2011) as both writer and producer. The positive reviews of that film allowed Miyazaki to

[17] Also released as *Ponyo on the Cliff* and *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*.

feel confident to make one final film and, in 2012, he announced plans for the feature *The Wind Rises*. A week after its first screening, Miyazaki announced his official retirement from directing and stepped down as the head of Studio Ghibli. This news sent shockwaves through the industry as well as fan communities yet this was tempered by the decidedly mixed reactions of audiences and critics to *The Wind Rises*. The film stirred division in Japan and internationally because of its focus on and fictionalisation of the life of Hirokoshi Jiro, the designer of the Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter, a figure seen by many outside Japan (primarily in Korea and China) as a war criminal responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians from the aeroplanes that he designed.

Influences On Miyazaki:

Those Who Worked Upon Him

McCarthy (2002) maintains that Miyazaki shows a lot more foreign, especially English and continental European, influences in his work than many of his contemporaries. This is echoed by Cavallaro (2011), who says that Miyazaki uses many classical Western fairy tales and fantasy works to both inform and enhance the narrative and images in the *mise-en-scenes* of his films. In Fretwell's (2012) opinion, this is because Miyazaki is from the Post-War generation of auteurs who looked to outside influence, rather than to Japanese traditions, to escape having to deal with their country's recent past. It was also common for studios to adapt Western literature and to adopt Western artistic styles, yet McCarthy (2002) and Napier (2007) argue that Miyazaki goes beyond such tropes. Cavallaro (2006, 2011) suggests that Miyazaki purposely sought out global narrative forms in order to expand his own range as a storyteller as well as to better show the images that he always had in mind, images which could only be found in sources from outside Japan. McCarthy (2002) and Cavallaro (2006) also point out an interesting thing about the literary influences that Miyazaki draws from: the majority of them are by female authors, such as Ursula Le Guin and Diana Wynne Jones, or are stories that revolve around strong female protagonists, such as L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series.

According to Tasker (2011), Miyazaki was also an ardent fan of many Japanese and European directors; most notably Akira Kurosawa and the Russian animator Yuriy Norshteyn – the latter of whom Miyazaki became close friends with. Moist and Bartholow (2007) state

that it was Miyazaki's love of live action films that allowed him to depict more realistic motion in his own work, combined with traditional camera techniques that other animators tend to forego as archaic. McCarthy (2002) and Wright and Clode (2005) point out that Miyazaki has also had working and personal relationships with many of the people who inspired him, including Ursula Le Guin – with whom he became friends after many years trying to persuade her to allow him to adapt her works. Miyazaki also had a well-known working relationship with, and respect for, the French artist and writer Jean Giraud (whose *nom de plume* was Moebius), having drawn on many of Giraud's mechanical designs for the film and manga of *Nausicaä*. Giraud also claimed to have been greatly inspired by the works of Miyazaki, to the point that he even named his daughter Nausicaä, after the character whom he inspired Miyazaki to create. Miyazaki (2014) said that they stayed close friends until Giraud's death in 2012 from cancer, which Miyazaki stated was 'a wound that would never heal'.

Of course, the influence that stands tallest for Miyazaki was the legendary Osamu Tezuka. In his 2011 interview with Yvonne Tasker (2011), when asked about his film *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki replied 'I wish Osamu Tezuka could have watched it because I wanted to show him what I could do'. In 1989, after Tezuka's death, Miyazaki wrote an essay on the influence that the manga creator and director had upon his own work. As usual, Miyazaki chided himself for attempting to copy Tezuka's style but also said that it allowed him to return to the most fundamental principles of illustration, which in turn allowed him to create his own style. To this day, Miyazaki claims to have a troubled view of Tezuka and his works, acknowledging their influence but also noting how he still compares himself to Tezuka, even years after his death.

All That Is Within:

The Themes and Meta-themes of Miyazaki's Filmography

The majority of the academics whose work was reviewed for this thesis agree that Miyazaki presents some very weighty themes (and meta-themes) in his collected works, yet people still debate what these themes actually are and why they are presented in the fashion that they are. Part of the reason is, as Napier (2006) contends, many people confuse themes with plot

devices or narrative conceits.

McCarthy (2002), Napier (2001, 2006, 2010), Cavallaro (2006) and Fretwell (2012) all consider the primary meta-themes that link Miyazaki's body of work, including but not limited to:

- the environment and natural world
- personal and social freedoms
- the nature of good and evil
- sexual equality and gender roles
- childhood and ideas of nostalgia
- personal development through self-discovery
- interpersonal relationships
- deconstructing socialised victim mentalities

Yet, as Wright and Clode (2005) argue, there is much more within Miyazaki's individual works than many people perceive. In his documentary *Ghibli et le mystère Miyazaki*[18] (2005), director Yves Montmayeur contends that Miyazaki is often pessimistic in his general attitudes but wishes to show his audience, particularly children, that the world is still a beautiful place that needs to be protected. Montmayeur (2005), along with Wright and Clode (2005), argue that this theme of transforming pessimism into a myriad-formed optimism is the true core of Miyazaki's thematic ideology.

The Natural World

Suzuki (2009) and Lim (2013), postulate that Miyazaki's most conveyed theme is that of environmentalism and of a reconnection with the natural world. Suzuki (2009) and Lim (2013) agree that these themes are seen most clearly in *Nausicaä*, *Laputa*, *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*. Yet there is a dichotomy in the interpretation of Miyazaki's depictions of environmental degradation in his films which affects how this theme's representations are constructed. The first interpretation sees Miyazaki's environmentalism as concerned with connection to the natural and, by extension, spiritual worlds. The second sees

[18] *Ghibli: The Miyazaki Temple* in the US and UK.

Miyazaki's depictions of environmental causes as part of a larger critique of the modern capitalist world that pushes an extreme consumerist ideology that ignores future consequences of present-day actions.

Reider (2005) thinks that Miyazaki's sense of environmentalism is connected with a sense of spiritualism. Reider's (2005) contention is that Miyazaki believes that people need to find their spiritual centre, through which they can have a true connection to the natural world. Reider (2005) and Wright and Clode (2005) argue that Miyazaki has this view because the two elements, the natural and the spiritual, are so intrinsically linked within the Japanese consciousness, rooted in the cultural traditions of Shinto. Wright and Clode (2005) believe this to be shown most strongly in *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*, with the mirroring of the natural/physical world with the Spirit World and how what humans do to the natural world (the environment) also affects the essence/appearance of the spiritual realm. Wright and Clode (2005) contend that this is a representation of how the pollution and corruption of both the natural and spiritual worlds are actually the pollution and corruption of the human soul, which taints human society as a whole.

Lim (2013), on the other hand, suggests that Miyazaki's environmental concerns are more in the vein of analogising social policies than they are portraying an animist mentality. Lim (2013) argues that each subsequent government's failure to address worsening acts of environmental degradation meant more planting of subversive images in his films by Miyazaki. Many of these subversive images are based on the worst excesses of environmental destruction, such as the mountains stripped bare by deforestation in *Princess Mononoke*. Reider (2005) and Cavallaro (2006) argue that Miyazaki is concerned that such physical stripping of the landscape echoes a stripping away of humanity's connection to the natural world, in both a physical and spiritual sense. This is similarly reflected in how the creators of the flying cities in *Laputa* abandoned their connection to the natural world by taking to the skies, leading to their civilisation's eventual downfall when they began to view the world below as composed merely of objects to be dominated by their vast machines, which ultimately proved too powerful to control. This is shown by the crater-marked landscape, showing the devastation caused by weapons, an incidental detail inspired by the battlefields of World War I (Miyazaki 2008).

Further, Napier (2001, 2006, 2007) shows how several of Miyazaki's films – including *Nausicaä* and *Princess Mononoke* – show their creator's views of what happens when the relationship between humanity and nature becomes unbalanced and the environment suffers destruction and degradation at human hands. In these films, the environment – be it through a natural or supernatural agent – attempts to overwhelm human works in order to repair the damage done by mankind and restore the natural balance. The resolutions of these films demonstrate Miyazaki's view that humanity is an agent of both destruction and restoration, because they can only come about through the willing self-sacrifice of a protagonist to satisfy the rage that the natural world is inflicting upon mankind for all that mankind has inflicted upon it. These sacrifices do not restore the entirety of the balance, nor of the environment, but instead open up the possibility that it is humanity returning to a more naturalistic mentality that will begin the restoration of the natural and, in turn, spiritual worlds.

Self-Discovery

Fretwell (2012) maintains that a key theme in Miyazaki's work is the journey of self-discovery, which Geortz (2010) relates to Campbell's (1949) theory of the monomyth. Although the monomyth's 'journey of discovery' is a common narrative trope, Geortz (2010) and Fretwell (2012) argue that Miyazaki uses it to engage the audience by making the protagonist's journey relatable, no matter how fantastical the narrative. To this end, Cavallaro (2006; 2011) refers to Kiki's struggle for self-reliance through finding her true talent and where she belongs in the world, which is the narrative drive of *Kiki's Delivery Service*. Both Cavallaro (2006) and Fretwell (2012) argue that Kiki's development, despite being magically aided, echoes many concerns of the audience, because they too often feel as though they are struggling to find their place and purpose in a confusing and chaotic world. Yet, Napier (2006) counters, Kiki can only find her agency and actuality not because of the loss of her magical powers but through the support of those around her, such as the bakery owner Osono and the wild painter Ursula (named in tribute to Ursula Le Guin). This is because these characters act as markers along her path and anchors to draw her back when she feels lost. Napier (2007) argues that Miyazaki is saying, in his meta-themology, that a person can only truly grow as a human being when they open themselves up to others and ask for help when help is needed, rejecting their stubborn pride and need for total self-reliance.

Napier (2001; 2006) suggests that this a major force in Miyazaki's meta-themes because people cannot develop in a vacuum – that is to say, in a space void of any emotional connection with people or place. It is only through the support of others, such as wise elders, stalwart companions and family (or family surrogates) that a person can hope to grow and achieve their own sense of agency. Napier (2006, 2010) argues that this is an important factor in *My Neighbour Totoro*, where the community, in which Satsuki and Mei have recently arrived, are brought together to find Mei after she gets lost, sharing a moment of great tension and grief when they think that she may have drowned in a deep pond, having found a girl's shoe floating on top, and then a communal sense of relief when it is discovered that the shoe does not belong to Mei. Satsuki also has to rely on the titular Totoro, a forest god, in order to find Mei but this can only occur after a series of events has drawn Totoro and the children together.

Like with many of Miyazaki's narratives, at least according to Cavallaro (2006) and Napier (2006), this connection first begins with fear, mainly of the unknown, and often more a product of social conditioning than of irrationality. This fear is then transformed into wonder at the protagonist witnessing of certain personal qualities, often magical in nature, of this "unknown other". Wonder soon burgeons into friendship and then, in several cases, into love. This can be seen in *Laputa*, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Spirited Away*, but also in an inverse form in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, where it is the loss of her magic that draws Kiki closer to others because she can no longer rely on her innate power to see her out of trouble. Fretwell (2012) also joins this idea of connection to Miyazaki's notion that in order for a person and, by extension, a society as a whole, to grow, they or it must begin to accept outsiders and the marginalised. This is typified by characters such as *Princess Mononoke*'s Eboshi, who, despite her outwardly greedy and violent nature, rescues prostitutes, giving these abused women positions of power over the men in her ironworks and treating them with a basic humanity that regular society did not afford them. Eboshi also takes in lepers, whom she treats with great kindness – changing their bandages and easing their pain in exchange for their technical expertise in redesigning muskets so they can be wielded easily by women and be better able to destroy the ancient forest gods.

Good versus Evil

Eboshi can also be viewed as a perfect representation of Miyazaki's view on the dichotomy of good and evil. Both Napier (2007) and Fretwell (2012) argue that the multilayered complexity of Eboshi, being presented as a violent antagonist yet possessed of many noble traits, symbolises Miyazaki's view that humans are complex entities who exist beyond simple moral constructs. Such traits can also be seen in the sky pirate Dola in *Laputa*, who first appears as a greedy antagonist but is later shown to be more complex, helpful and sympathetic, even becoming a grandmotherly figure to the two orphaned protagonists. Cavallaro (2006), in a similar vein, argues that Miyazaki does not believe in the simplistic view that people are entirely good or evil; to Miyazaki, there are few truly evil people in the world, only those with noble goals who fall to self-interest and greed after their hearts become corrupted by their own anger and singular drive. This fall robs them of what Miyazaki sees as the most basic elements of their humanity: compassion and empathy.

In Napier's (2007) view, this moral fall is best highlighted by Princess Kushana from *Nausicaä*, whose need to protect her people is ultimately corrupted by her desire for revenge against the Ohmu, the giant insects who once crippled her, as well as by her fear of enemy nations destroying her kingdom. In fact, Napier (2001, 2007) and McCarthy (2002) argue that many of Miyazaki's antagonists – such as Eboshi and Jiko-bo from *Princess Mononoke* or Fujimoto from *Ponyo* – act primarily out of greed and self-interest to achieve their goals, even if they believe that they have the best interests of others at heart. This runs counter to the protagonists, who often deny their self-interest in order to protect the one whom they love or sacrifice themselves for the greater good. San and Ashitaka (*Princess Mononoke*) and Sophie (*Howl's Moving Castle*) can be seen as the epitome of this notion, because they offer up their very lives in order to see peace and balance restored to the world, as well as to save those precious to them.

Role of the Feminine

Napier (1998, 2001, 2006, 2007) has written extensively about Miyazaki's construction of his female characters. In fact, Napier (2010) argues that one of the reasons for the international popularity of Miyazaki's films is that he does not patronise his audiences with clichéd tropes of femininity – such as limiting female roles to damsels in distress, mothers/sisters or

sexualised idols. Similarly to how he addressed the notion of good and evil, Miyazaki approaches his female characters as multifaceted individuals who are able to develop their own sense of agency within the narrative (Cavallaro 2006). Miyazaki also applies this view to the workplace, as Toshio Suzuki (2003), the President of Studio Ghibli, stated when he referred to Miyazaki as 'a feminist' because 'he has this conviction that to be successful, companies have to make it possible for their female employees to succeed too. You can see this attitude in *Princess Mononoke.* All characters working the bellows in the iron works are women. Then there's *Porco Rosso.* Porco's plane is rebuilt entirely by women'.

However, Fretwell (2012) argues that Miyazaki holds contradicting attitudes to many of his female characters, especially his early ones. Fretwell (2012) demonstrates this by referring to Sheeta, the heroine from *Laputa*, who takes on all of the domestic duties during her and Pazu's travels with Dola's sky pirates, while Pazu takes the role of the traditional, masculine, hero. Cavallaro's (2006) view arguably counters this by claiming that Sheeta's domestic role exists in the context of the narrative, demonstrating her path to taking responsibility and developing a strong work ethic, similar to Kiki using domestic chores as a way to prove her independence. Napier (2001) further argues that Miyazaki's creation of San and Eboshi in *Princess Mononoke* is an important step in the depiction of female characters in Japanese media, because they are free of typical and clichéd gender roles. Cavallaro (2006:122) cites Miyazaki's reasons for doing this: he wanted to explore the liminal nature of the Muromachi Period (1337-1573), saying that this era 'was a world in which chaos and change were the norm. It was a more fluid period, when there were no distinctions between peasants and samurai, when women were bolder and freer'.

Childhood and Nostalgia

Ross (2010) argues that Miyazaki has an idealised view of childhood, as seen in the semi-rural setting of *My Neighbour Totoro* or the adventurous wonder of *Ponyo*. Ross (2010) also notes that almost all of the children exist outside virtual space, devoid of many modern forms of technology and distraction. Napier (2007) and Suzuki (2009) counter this by arguing that Miyazaki works in a space of personal memory, which takes on the appearance of nostalgia, in order to better actualise both location and character in his films. Cavallaro (2006), for example, states that the pastoral setting and the mother's illness in *My Neighbour Totoro* is

actually based on events in Miyazaki's own life; suggesting Miyazaki may have been using these elements to work through lingering issues that he had regarding his childhood and what a child goes through when confronted with something that they don't entirely understand – such as the fear of loss and death. Napier (2001) further contends that Miyazaki works to reject notions of nostalgia, especially when expressed through branding and soft power initiatives, because he does not believe that childhood should be a time that people regress to. Napier (2007) further argues that Miyazaki's young characters are forced to mature in many of his films by confronting difficult choices or situations, such as the possibility of loss and death. Cavallaro (2006) refers to Miyazaki's depictions of character who are never able to remain childish as a counter to the portrayal of children who are forced to act youthfully yet have to perform adult actions – such as those involving sex or violence, which are prevalent tropes in many forms of Japanese media.

We Are Not the Victims

One of Miyazaki's great concerns is addressing *higaisha ishiki* − or 'victim mentality' − that Miyazaki felt had been perpetuated by consecutive governments (Napier 2001; Napier 2007; Cavallaro 2006). Japanese ethno-sociologist Boye Lafayette De Mente (2013:74) writes: 'It has long been symptomatic for the Japanese to blame others for their problems and for any of their actions that results in friction or criticism'. De Mente (2013) claims this tendency to blame others exists on all levels of society, from personal interactions up to the corporate level. This, in turn, as Sugimoto (2014) points out, is often transformed into a form of exceptionalism where the Japanese nation and culture cannot be criticised by outsiders, be they a social/ethnic minority or a foreign nation. De Mente (2013) points out that the idea of *higaisha ishiki* found its origins during the US occupation of Japan after World War II and was further enforced within the national consciousness when the US forced Japan to adopt a pacifist constitution and remove the Emperor from any position of authority − something which many Japanese people found deeply humiliating and insulting yet were unable to readdress. Instead, as Sugimoto (2014) suggests, many of those in power in Japan, especially nationalist politicians and media creators, promoted the idea that Japan was a victim of circumstance and the brutality of the atomic bomb were unjust crimes inflicted upon an innocent populace, thus creating an atmosphere of exceptionalism and denial that helped breed a victim mentality. Clammer (2012) and De Mente (2013) both further highlight that it

has long been a common practice within Japanese news and fictional media to blame some external influence, usually foreign in origin, for society's ills, or social minority, like *otaku*, and to claim that Japanese individuals, and society as a whole, are not responsibility for the condition of Japanese society but rather are the victims of circumstance or the agendas of outside others. Napier (2001, 2007) and McCarthy (2002) both suggest that in order to address the perpetuation of this Victim Mentality, Miyazaki removed many of his narratives from a strictly Japanese location, usually putting them in a realistic yet fantastical version of post-industrial Europe – as seen in *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Howl's Moving Castle*. Miyazaki also addresses and subverts the expectation of victimisation by having his protagonists take responsibility not only for their own actions but for the actions of others [see **Chapters 4** and **5**].

Constructing the Communal

Slater and Galbraith (2011), Clammer (2012) and De Mente (2013) all agree that over the past thirty years, various programme enactors and investors in Japan have been foisting a contradictory form of masculinity, in which only the strong prevail, yet men must foster friendships and rivalries to become stronger. This is enforced by the idea of consensus identity that is based on a sense of monolithic nationalism centred on powerful masculine images and cultural archetypes, such as gangsters, superheroes and warriors. Ross (2010) states that these ideologies greatly alarmed Miyazaki, since he wished that people would see each other as individuals who are part of a community rather than as people who are isolated from others, unable to form even the most basic of social connections. Napier (2001, 2005, 2007) argues that every film Miyazaki made focused on the interconnectedness of people or on the restoration of a community. McCarthy (2002) suggests that this is a reflection of Miyazaki's idealised childhood, as seen in *My Neighbour Totoro* when the community is drawn together by the tragedy of potential loss at the same time as the central protagonists' family holds together, despite potentially losing their mother.

Niskanen (2010) notes, however, that the connections, families and communities in Miyazaki's works are not based on the standard Japanese forms of obligation or deference to seniority, but Miyazaki instead depicts forms of connection and bonding based on trust – either earned or based on faith – as well as on mutual respect and burgeoning affection.

Horiki (2001) has criticised the way Miyazaki's characters form connections as simplistic and naïve, almost child-like, arguing, further, that Miyazaki is not so much concerned with the complexities of character and narrative but rather with producing mere entertainments. Napier's (2006) claim runs counter to this: Miyazaki, in Napier's view, is showing his audience that childhood is a more perfect state of being because children are naturally accepting of differences and that people would be better if they possessed such child-like qualities. Cavallaro (2006) adds that this is best illustrated by *My Neighbour Totoro,* in which the central protagonists lack preconceived notions of others and are able to more readily connect with strangers, such as Satsuki and Mei's acceptance of Totoro and the other *kami*. On the other hand, as Cavallaro (2010) and Niskanen (2010) both point out, those of Miyazaki's characters who do have preconceived notions of society and the roles within it, such as Eboshi and Kushana, find it more difficult to allow themselves to form connections because of their societally inbuilt prejudices. Niskanen (2010) argues that this is visible in the behaviour of Kiki in *Kiki's Delivery Service* when she refuses to interact with different types of individuals until she finds her pre-ordained role within society, and that it is Kiki's journey to remove her pre-conceived notions of social roles and accept different people no matter their faults that completes her development as a character.

Against Controversy

Ross (2010) makes the point that one reason for Miyazaki's sustained popularity and continued relevance to contemporary society is because he is not seen using his productions to preach. Yet, as David Stratton (2014) stated in his review of *The Wind Rises* on *At The Movies*, this leaves many of Miyazaki's messages ambiguous and means that the issues that he attempts to raise can be quickly subsumed or distorted by others. This subversion of Miyazaki's own subversions could be seen as a potential failure of the director's intention and as the ultimate victory of the Cool Japan initiative, except that such dissonance between intention and perceived result opens up the very notion of subversion itself to be more closely examined.

This discontinuity between intended subversion and the ideology that the audience take in is best revealed by the various reactions to Miyazaki's final, and most controversial, film *The Wind Rises*.

According to Keegan (2013), Miyazaki spawned so much controversy because of how he attempted to keep the film true to the period it is set in but also inserted his own views of history into it. Organisations as diverse as right-wing Japanese political parties, Japanese nationalist and anti-smoking campaigners (who thought that Miyazaki was glorifying the act of smoking and tobacco products in the film) attacked Miyazaki for what they claimed were his personal impositions upon recent Japanese history (Keegan 2013). Miyazaki also attracted a great deal of criticism from internet commentators and revisionist history fringe groups who attacked him for his stances (perceived and actual) on the imperialistic ideals of the Japan of the early to mid-20th century (McCurry 2013). To add further to this controversy, in an interview with Yamamoto Nasuka, Miyazaki attacked Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's attempts to rewrite the Japanese constitution to allow for more direct military action in response to perceived threats from China (Ashcraft 2013). This was also something Miyazaki had condemned the Japanese government for in the 1990s, when it attempted to amend their pacifist constitution to allow for militarised peacekeeping on behalf of the UN (McCarthy 2002).

Conversely, Miyazaki and *The Wind Rises* also generated strong debate within, and condemnation from, the other side of the socio-political spectrum. Many Left-wing pundits and organisations attacked Miyazaki over what they believed was the glorification of a war criminal (McCurry 2013). Many internet groups in South Korea and China virulently attacked the film, Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli, calling for *The Wind Rises* to be banned and all copies destroyed as well as for a boycott of Studio Ghibli works and other Japanese media and commercial products.

During the controversy around *The Wind Rises*, Miyazaki did not attempt to deflect the criticisms directed at him, his studio and his film. Instead, he addressed them directly through a series of interviews with publications such as *Asahi Shinbun*, citing his stance on recent Japanese history and the attitudes of Japanese people to their own past (Ashcraft 2013). According to Norris and Shadow (2014), Miyazaki intended this film to be both a final ode to the majesty of aviation as well as to demonstrate what happens when 'a man sells his soul to follow his dreams'. Miyazaki also argued that he chose the Zero because it 'represented one

of the few things we Japanese could be proud of – they were a truly formidable presence, and so were the pilots who flew them', but at the same time acknowledged 'the horror and devastation that the Zero caused', which he believes is 'something that Japan has never taken true responsibility for' (Ashcraft 2013). Miyazaki also acknowledged his own 'very complex feelings' towards World War II, acknowledging that 'all sides involved must confront what they did without forcing blame upon each other' (Ashcraft 2013).

The Wind Rises is not the only Miyazaki film to attract controversy from members of the media. McCarthy (2002) and Fretwell (2012) note that conservative Japanese newspapers, such as *Yomiuri Shinbun*, have often criticised Miyazaki for failing to promote Japanese interests and ideology. *Yomiuri Shinbun* has also frequently attacked Miyazaki for his use of Euro-centric narratives and images (Napier 2007). Cavallaro (2006) argues that critics also lambasted Miyazaki's Japanese-based films for being too Left-leaning in their ideologies and not representative of perceived Japanese social or political interests.

The Effect of the Outsider

Another issue that needs to be acknowledged when dealing with national branding is when a foreign media investor acquires media and applies their own cultural normatives and ideologies to them. Denison (2008) argues that the translation and de-culturalisation of Miyazaki's works when they are appropriated by another corporate entity, such as the Disney Corporation, is central to the destruction of his messages. Denison (2008) contends that when Miyazaki's films are translated for an American audience, many aspects of their core themes are transformed, removed or ignored in order to appeal to a different cultural market with different expectations from animated media. Denison (2008) and Ross (2010) also cite the manipulation of Miyazaki's narratives and character depictions by foreign media producers and translators in order to attract the attention of consumers who are unfamiliar with Miyazaki's works, or with anime in general, by toning down or removing many elements that they deem unpalatable for their target demographic – primarily young children. These elements often include depictions of violence, as well as social taboos like smoking, drinking alcohol, nudity or, to Western audiences, unfamiliar sexualities and gender roles.

McCarthy (2002) cites the 1985 release of a heavily edited version of *Nausicaä* by New

World Pictures as an example of Miyazaki overcoming agenda-driven translation and editing by a foreign media investor. In this release, New World Pictures cut the majority of the environmental themes and transformed the Ohmu into incarnations of evil rather than the guardian entities that Miyazaki intended them to be. New World Pictures also altered and removed several characters, changed Nausicaä's name and then downplayed her role in the narrative in favour of an invented male protagonist. Miyazaki was both infuriated and confused by these alterations, putting a clause in contracts for future international releases that the films remain uncut (McCarthy 2002; Napier 2007). Napier (2010) argues that this attitude of Miyazaki's led to many of his films not receiving international releases for many years, as well as to an argument with the head of Miramax, Harvey Weinstein, who wanted to edit and censor his company's release of *Princess Mononoke* to make it more suitable for children. Unfortunately, as Denison (2008) points out, this "no cuts" rule did not prevent Disney from adding dialogue to *Spirited Away*, as well as stripping many cultural signifiers from the film, including supernatural elements that are closely tied to Japanese mythology, so that they could be understood by a foreign audience without the necessary cultural understanding.

Conclusion

It is easy to argue that in order to understand an auteur's films, you must first understand the individual behind them, and this holds true for Miyazaki. The pattern of his personality echoes the themes that are embedded in all of his films. After studying his life, the events that imbued Miyazaki with a sense of compassion and a longing for people to explore the connections within their lives – be it to the gods, nature or simply to their neighbours – are easy to make out. Miyazaki's themes are not rigid, unyielding ideological works yet they are strong enough to permeate and enrich his narratives. This can be seen in the complexity with which Miyazaki constructs his characters' moral contradictions and complex motivations, and even more in how he renders his heroines as richly detailed, not merely as objects of desire or as prizes to be won. There is love in his work: a love of machines which reflects a love of modernity and freedom, yet also a love of nature and the pastoral life. Nevertheless, many of Miyazaki's friends and critics say, as Ross (2012:8) does, that Miyazaki is a 'deeply complex and conflicted man'. It is this conflict and complexity that allows Miyazaki to

question himself and his beliefs, which in turn allows him to question and challenge the beliefs of others. This is a questioning that does not diminish the beliefs of others but rather allows for others to question what they are being told in life without brow-beating them.

Cavallaro (2006) argues that Miyazaki's unpatronising approach to his audience is what allows him to be subversive in his films; he presents arguments, ideas and images yet he does not use them to preach his personal beliefs to his audience. His core concerns of love, justice, the interconnected nature of humanity, as well as the dichotomy of being, in which people are depicted as multifaceted creatures rather than being rendered in simple colours, echo through each of his films. These echoes help to construct a dialogue with his audience, who see his themes as making his films what they are. Yet Miyazaki grants his audience the freedom to choose what they take from his works and what they may choose to make central to their own perceptions of the world.

CHAPTER 4

When Pigs Flew

A study of *Porco Rosso*

> The story is filled with freedom and pride, it's simple and stripped of artifice, and the motivations of its characters are depicted with the utmost clarity.
>
> Miyazaki (2009:267)

This chapter focuses on the film *Porco Rosso*[19] (1992) and begins with a brief overview of the film before identifying the film's themes and reflecting upon how Miyazaki uses them to establish a subversion of the national branding and soft power practices of the period. This chapter also explores Miyazaki's reactions to programme enactors and investors efforts attempts to implement gender identities during a period of growing socio-economic instability by placing the film in a historical period that underwent similar socio-economic changes.

Porco Rosso was Miyazaki's sixth film as director and fourth film for Studio Ghibli. It has garnered much in the way of audience and critical attention as well as several awards, yet it is not his most lauded work. It was, however, Studio Ghibli's most popular and profitable film for a time and remained Japan's highest grossing animated film until the release of *Princess Mononoke* in 1997 (Cavallaro 2006).

Upon first viewing, *Porco Rosso*, like many of Miyazaki's works, has the appearance of a modern fairy tale, with magic, adventure and romance flickering beneath the surface. However, academics such as Moist and Bartholow (2007) argue that the themes of the narrative run much deeper than the simple tropes of magical realism. Napier (2007) and Fretwell (2012) add to this by arguing that the film represents many of Miyazaki's opinions about freedom, anti-fascism, war and pacificism. Indeed, Cavallaro (2006) refers to how

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[19] *Kurenai no Buta* (lit. *Crimson Pig*)

events like the Yugoslav Wars (1991-1999) affected Miyazaki during the film's production, by bringing to the surface the memories of his early childhood at the close of World War II and the deprivation of the Japanese people as they began to rebuild the nation under foreign occupation.

The film is set in the Adriatic Sea between the World Wars, during the rise of the fascist state in Italy and the global economic depression of the 1930s. It focuses on the adventures of Marco Pagot,[20] a WWI fighter ace who has been mysteriously transformed into an anthropomorphic pig and now makes a living hunting Seaplane Pirates while trying to avoid the encroaching fascist government − which wishes to eliminate any force outside its control.

Ostensibly, *Porco Rosso* is Miyazaki's ode to a classic period of aviation and European fairy tales as well as a reference to early Hollywood film-making and actors. Cavallaro (2006) states that Miyazaki pays homage to these inspirations by making references to the fictional and biographical works of Roald Dahl and to the aeronautical designs of early Italian plane builders like Caproni and Piaggio. Additionally, Cavallaro (2006; 2011) sees the mixing fairy tale allusions with a historical period in a real geographical location as important thematically to the film and its readings, while Moist and Bartholow (2007) argue that such images are merely a framework upon which Miyazaki has built his arguments for auteur status and creative control by harking back to a period in which creators – be they film-makers or aeroplane designers/engineers – had the freedom to experiment and attempt whatever came to mind.

Identifying the Themes Within

The consensus among academics, critics and audiences is that *Porco Rosso* is an unabashed love letter to Miyazaki's true passions: flight and the freedom that it brings. Moist and Bartholow (2007) maintain that all of the themes in the film are linked to the idea of flight, as represented by the aesthetic beauty of post-World War 1 aircraft. Specifically, Moist and Bartholow (2007) argue that Marco, having been turned into a pig, only has one love left to

[20] Marco Rousolini in the US release.

him: his ability to fly. In the scene where he is asked by Fio why he still flies after all he's been through, Marco simply replies 'Because it's all I can do'. Moist and Bartholow (2007) further suggest that this represents Miyazaki's own desire for freedom as a media creator: freedom from governmental or other agents of control. Napier (2007) adds that Miyazaki wishes to escape earthly bonds of creative control to truly soar the skies of imagination, allowing himself to make whatever his heart desires without being hamstrung by pushy investors or government censors. In a way, Miyazaki is placing himself in the role of Marco, making films because he feels that is all he can do in life and he wishes to enjoy the freedoms that film-making brings.

Napier (2001, 2007) further adds to this idea of freedom by arguing that Miyazaki wishes to show the freedom that women have in his world. Unlike the majority of his previous works, *Porco Rosso* does not have a female central protagonist, but Napier (2006) strongly believes that women play a central role in the narrative. This can be seen in the characters of Gina and Fio, who stand at seemingly opposite ends of the agency scale: Gina possessing passive yet empowered traits, whilst Fio is far more action-oriented and outgoing, burning with the passion and energy of youth (Napier 2001, 2006, 2007). Drazen (2007) agrees that female characters are important to the narrative but feels, rather, that they are figures of distant desire, represented by Gina, or producers of desired products, such as Fio's aeroplane designs.

However, Rustin and Rustin (2012) interpret *Porco Rosso* as being primarily concerned with ideas of loss; specifically, the loss of freedom, as well as the loss of life and the responsibilities that come with dealing with such tragedy. Fretwell (2012) further argues that the idea of death and the feelings of responsibility to those who have died and those who have survived are key to the film's plot. Moist and Bartholow (2007) and Napier (2007) also contend, in this vein, that the loss, and continued rejection, of one's own humanity are important themes in the film, claiming that this is shown by Marco's transformation into a pig and his continued cynicism about human action, dismissing them all by saying 'Hey, I'm just a pig, remember?'. Yet Marco still clings to, and indulges in, the trappings of human society, such as food, women and wine.

Drazen (2007), as well as Moist and Bartholow (2007), propose that *Porco Rosso* is also Miyazaki's tribute to the Golden Age of Hollywood, as well as to Japanese film-making of the pre-war period, as revealed in the director's placing of many visual and thematic references to those periods throughout the work, both overtly and subtly. Napier (2007) argues that this was done as a rejection of the Japanese media production houses' use at the time of more modernist Hollywood tropes, as well as a general dismissal of how many Japanese films were being made at the time that pandered to bombast over core narrative development and respect for their characters.

Finally, in terms of major thematic presences, Napier (2001, 2007) and Fretwell (2012) argue that the idea of fairy tales and modern fantasy/magical realism play a huge part in the film's story because of Marco's curse and his place in the narrative world. On the other hand, Drazen (2007) thinks that the fantastical elements are not as important as the film's other themes, such as Miyazaki's ideas of sex and purity. Again, this divergence in opinion on the film's themes can be argued to be one of its key strengths because, as Napier (2007) suggests, it allows for multiple viewings to garner a greater understanding of the work. Yet, despite the divergence of opinion, all material reviewed shows a consensus on the themes of flight, freedom, masculinity, as well as the loss caused by war and aggression, as being the primary themes that Miyazaki wished to explore.

Analysing the Themes and Images in *Porco Rosso*

Unlike *Princess Mononoke* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, academics and audiences are far more divided as to what the primary themes of *Porco Rosso* are. While Napier (2001, 2007), Moist and Bartholow (2007), Drazen (2007) and Fretwell (2012) all contend that Miyazaki wishes to speak of freedom within the film, none of them agree on what form of freedom he wishes to express. This is related to what form of responsibility they feel Miyazaki wishes to advocate, as well as to what degree he truly wishes to speak about the role of women, both in modern society and in narrative constructs. There is also discord over how much *Porco Rosso* is a critique of programme enactors' attempts to influence the media industry, with Moist and Bartholow (2007) maintaining that the film is a simple, if conservative, ode to a film-making past, and Napier (2001) arguing that it is an open commentary on early 1990s Japan and, by

extension, issues affecting the world as a whole. Because of the divergence of opinion, it is best to look first at those themes about which there is consensus. The theme that the majority of critics and commentators can agree is the *raison d'être* of the film is the idea of freedom.

Flight and Freedom

In order to understand what 'freedom' means to someone like Miyazaki, it must first be understood what it means more generally. Friedrich Nietzsche holds, in *Human, All Too Human* (1878), that when speaking of freedom, cultural weight is always being brought to the word, meaning that the person speaking of freedom imposes upon the concept the social conventions of their own particular time and place. On this point Napier (2007) and Moist and Bartholow (2007) fundamentally agree. They argue that the transcendental nature of the word *freedom* is often pulled down by the connotations that we unconsciously apply to it due to our cultural backgrounds. To strip the word down to its most basic meaning, we must understand that freedom to an American is different from a Japanese person's idea of freedom. This is something that should not be generalised or taken out of context, lest discussion fall into cultural stereotyping. La Faber (1997) and De Mente (2013) have written about how the definition of freedom is often a point of contention between Japan and the US, especially in regard to creating a historical and cultural identity. According to De Mente (2013) this is primarily because the US believes in a broad spectrum of (theoretical) freedoms, something which Japan often believes is being imposed on them by US soft power enactors. Japanese programme enactors and investors, however, prefer the more vertical hierarchy afforded by the *Nihonjinron*[21] system to maintain social balance, which, they claim, has historical precedence in Japanese society. Although the form of freedom that Miyazaki wishes to depict – be it in its US or Japanese ideological form – is elusive, the means and method of depicting freedom remains constant.

Napier (2001, 2007, 2010) argues that Miyazaki's obsession with flying and the mechanics of flight are to do with the ideas of possibility and freedom. Indeed, flight and flying machines

[21] Literally "the Study of Japanese People", also considered to be a theory of Japanese exceptionalism. A pseudo-psychological and ethnographic field designed by various governmental and academic parties to show that Japan has a culture unique to itself and could therefore not be criticised by outside groups. Often depicts Japanese society as a vertical hierarchy based on a patriarchal family structure, with authority coming from the father down to the first son and so forth, which is mirrored in other social environments.

are arguably Miyazaki's most common visual theme; this can be seen in the flying bike and broomsticks of *Kiki's Delivery Service* or the wondrous aircraft in *Laputa*. Napier (2005, 2007) points out that every example of flight in Miyazaki's films begins with a character's dreams of freedom and the possibilities that come with having the endless sky before them. Moist and Bartholow (2007) suggest an alternative interpretation by proposing that Miyazaki does not argue for true freedom but rather is commenting on the limitation that freedom brings to the individual. Rustin and Rustin (2011) add to this by saying that Miyazaki's notions of freedom are always tempered by a sense of responsibility and obligation. Miyazaki (2009) states that when he is creating a work, he always feels responsible for and obliged to two groups: his staff/colleagues and his audience: 'I always feel responsible to my audience because they let me indulge myself so much but I can never let myself get carried away and give them something that they won't understand,' he said, adding that 'my treasured collaborators help keep me grounded and focussed on the tasks at hand. Otherwise nothing would ever get finished because I would be too busy dreaming up new stories to tell without completing what I am meant to' (Miyazaki 2009:87-8).

Over the course of *Porco Rosso*, Marco separates himself from many social conventions and obligations, such as the demands of the fascist government for his services and loyalty. In doing this, Marco personally chooses to whom he is obliged to throughout the narrative, giving his loyalty to those whom he thinks have earned it, based on respect and a sense of mutual obligation (Cavallaro 2006). Napier (2001, 2005) pushes the idea that Miyazaki believes that obligation is not tied directly to the notion of freedom but rather to personal morality and choice; Marco knows that he cannot escape his financial debt to Piccolo, nor Fio's insistence on travelling with him, but he can choose how to respond to them, thus giving Fio a chance to see her design brought to life and the possibilities/limitations of the wider world.

Pride and Machismo

Napier (2001) and Cavallaro (2006) argue that one theme that makes the film interesting is how Marco treats people based on his personal moral code and ideas of responsibility and honour, demonstrating that he still believes in the Pilots' Code despite his overt rejection of human conventions. Napier (2001) contends that this extends to Marco's pacificism as well,

where he refuses to kill his opponents, even when it would be more beneficial for him to do so. Marco's personal sense of honour and rejection of many of the negative aspects of human nature, coupled with his time in the War, keeps his violence in check. Moist and Bartholow (2007) argue that this is more in keeping with the classic Hollywood trope that heroes do not kill unless they are left without choice, whereas Rustin and Rustin (2012) argue that Marco feels he has an obligation to all who have died to avoid killing if he can.

Napier (2007) believes that these forms of obligation that Marco holds himself to are in contrast to the machismo of pride and honour that branding enactors attempted to foist upon the Japanese public. Pride and honour, typically masculine ideals, are held to be common tropes in anime because of the medium's general focus on a young male audience. Clammer (2012) argues how Japanese media creators often produce narratives focussed on revenge or a need to save face/regain honour through violent acts. Slater and Galbraith (2011) contend that programme enactors and investors had attempted in the 1990s to push for a re-invention of the masculine image through media products – especially violent, sexually charged, hyper-masculine manga and anime – arguing that such series pushed the ideology that true men must embrace stoic individualism rather than cooperate with others, use lust instead of romance, and enact extreme violence as the only form of conflict resolution. Napier (2007) further argues that the promotion of such ideologies was a critical failing of programme enactors and investors, one that Miyazaki was quick to criticise and subvert in his filmography by using primarily female protagonists who deconstructed the traditionally masculine hero and saviour roles. Napier (2007) goes on to point out how Miyazaki's male protagonists often show no fear of using gentleness, compassion and self-sacrifice rather than merely resorting to violence to resolve conflicts – in clear opposition to the hyper-masculinity highlighted by Slater and Galbraith (2011).

McCarthy (2002) argues that within the narrative of *Porco Rosso*, pride and honour – or the assumed taking of them from others – is the driving force of conflict. The Seaplane Pirates, shamed at their constant losses to Marco, swallow their pride to hire the American pilot Curtis, who in turn is driven by his own pride to beat Marco. Napier (2001, 2007) further develops this theme of masculine pride by arguing that it is more central to the themes of responsibility and freedom that Miyazaki wishes to depict than it is to reinforcing Japan's

masculine self-image as envisioned by the programme enactors and investors. Moist and Bartholow (2007) take a different view when they argue that Curtis' pride is merely a plot device allowing Miyazaki to stage spectacular aerial skirmishes and make references to classic movie characters. Yet Curtis' pride can be seen as being a driving force for the film's action *and* its narrative, as well as being a critique on media and society as a whole.

Napier (2001, 2007) argues that because Curtis is young, he is driven to take more risks in order to satisfy his ego and prove his superiority, while Marco, a distinguished war veteran, has nothing to prove and no need to satisfy his pride, so he can lose face rather than risk his life in some foolish display of machismo. This is best illustrated when Marco is ambushed by Curtis – who is still seething from the fact that Marco did not attempt to stop an earlier pirate raid due to engine trouble. Marco, simply wishing to get his plane fixed, attempts to flee because he feels that he has nothing to gain from combat, yet Curtis, because of his pride, refuses to accept that and so shoots Marco down. Thinking that Marco is dead, Curtis recovers a scrap of Marco's red plane to prove his success. Curtis then leaves thinking that he has won, when in truth Marco has hidden himself, and what remains of his plane, safely away. Napier (2001) argues that Curtis' machismo and constant need to prove himself derive from his own pride and lack of a sense of personal responsibility to those around him. Curtis is seen by the other characters as an immature mercenary who is only interested in his own self-promotion, his goal being to become a famous Hollywood movie star and eventually the President of the United States (Napier 2001). This sense of immaturity is enhanced by his attempts to claim the love of any beautiful woman he sees, including Gina and Fio. It is Fretwell's (2012) view that Curtis exists as Miyazaki's critique upon how the programme enactors and investors wished to project Japan's image – nationally and internationally – at the time of the film's production. This was done by the programme enactors, giving Japan itself an overly masculine persona using reimagined historical or invented personas; such as samurai cutting down enemies or cyborgs crushing their (economic) opponents with machine-like efficiency (Jin 2010). Lam (2007) and Ross (2010) further add that Japan wished to position itself as a fierce contender in terms of cultural influence which, like Curtis, would court anything that catches its eye; in reality, Japan was on unstable ground because of its faltering economy and inability to be taken seriously as a potential economic superpower. Napier (2001, 2007) and Clammer (2012) claim that the worse the economic situation

became, the more masculine Japan's media and branding became, until such a hyper-masculinised image came to be seen almost as a self-satire and counterproductive to any branding efforts.

Marco and Curtis, Fretwell argues, can therefore be seen as representations of Miyazaki's view of the Japanese masculine image, with Curtis representing the brash, impulsive new Japanese persona, one which aggressively seeks dominance by attacking the weakness of its enemies, flying out of the sun or ambushing from the clouds. Curtis as a character is opportunistic but fearless, even reckless in his attempts to satisfy his masculine pride yet is unable to stand against a figure of stoic experience like Gina, who represents a more traditional view of non-masculine, Zen-like passive strength. Jin (2012) contends that this reflects Japan's aggressive international economic policies, under which programme enactors and investors sought to dominate entire markets through the use of the prestige and quality that Japanese products evoked but were unable to stand against the cultural dominance of better established soft power and branding industries, like Hollywood. However, in the view of Cavallaro (2006), Marco represents Miyazaki's view of a more classic Japanese masculinity: where Curtis is brash, Marco is quiet; where Curtis is boastful, Marco is humble. According to Cavallaro (2006), Marco is the figure that Miyazaki would prefer people to emulate because he represents a masculine ideal without machismo. He seeks thrills but is responsible for his actions; he will risk his life for those he considers his friends; and, while he can be impulsive in his anger, also uses cunning and intelligence rather than brute force against any difficulties that he has. These traits alone, Napier (2007) contends, fly in the face of how many programme enactors and investors wished to portray the modern Japanese male through the creation of overly masculine roles and behaviour.

Napier (2001, 2007) continues her argument by stating that it is through Marco and Curtis that Miyazaki truly subverts the ideology of masculine pride; in these characters he shows two polar opposites in terms of actions and beliefs, yet still shows how similar they are in many ways. Napier's (2001, 2007) argument is that while masculine pride may be a driver to the plot, it is Gina and Fio's manipulation and subversion of that trait that is the true force behind the narrative.

The Role of the Feminine

Both Napier (2007) and Fretwell (2012) contend that Gina can be seen through the trope of the experienced and jaded (aristocratic) lady, who chides Curtis for his immaturity and lack of worldly experience, while treating Marco with an accepting and loving courtesy – showing that she still sees him as human despite Marco's own views on the matter. Cavallaro (2006) affirms that Gina is not the passive, distant goddess-like figure that Drazen (2007) claims her to be, but rather that she has her own sense of agency and power because she possesses a privileged social position. This can be seen in how she has the admiration of so many rival groups who frequent her hotel, to the point that she can silence them all with a smile. Napier (2001) further argues that Fio falls into the trope of the feisty, passionate yet inexperienced girl who is eager to prove herself in a masculine field, standing against anyone who cannot see beyond her gender. This can be seen in Fio's admonitions of the Seaplane Pirates, which halt their destruction of Marco's newly built aeroplane, by appealing to – and then rebuking – their sense of masculine pride and honour. Napier (2001) insists that it is Fio's personal sense of pride – in her work as an aeroplane designer and as a woman – that gains her the respect and adoration of the Seaplane Pirates. Her pride also allows her to counter the bullying affection of Curtis, who wishes to use her as a prize in a duel between him and Marco. Her pride and intelligence also see Fio tricking Curtis into paying off Marco's debt if he, Curtis, loses the dogfight. Napier (2007) further contends that it is Fio's special, non-selfish sense of pride that allows her not to become a simple damsel-in-distress; instead she takes control of her own life and agency by standing up to anyone who attempts to put her into any traditional feminine roles – be they socially or narratively constructed.

Through the use of such dynamically polar female characters, Napier (2007) and Fretwell (2012) argue that Miyazaki wishes to address not only the depiction of women in media but also in the limited social roles afforded them in Japanese society. Roles that often restrict them to being housewives, office ladies or any other kind of non-physical worker. This can be seen in how the manual labour in the film, specifically the construction of Marco's new aeroplane, is performed by women. This is partly because the men have had gone elsewhere to find work during because of the encroaching economic depression but also because the factory owner Piccolo believes that the women are more capable of building Marco's new aeroplane. Piccolo sees the women as being better workers than any of the men who have remained in the city because of their dedicated work ethic and willingness to do manual

labour. Miyazaki (2009:290) said of this that 'Women shouldn't be afraid of physical labour and men shouldn't be afraid of seeing them do it. They aren't as fragile as people think and, in most cases, they are better at the work than a lot of men'. Ross (2010) points out that women doing physical labour was commonplace in Miyazaki's post-war youth and that Miyazaki feels that society has become too protective of women in modern times. With many enactors and investors seeing women as, and forcing them to become, more subservient ornaments than as actual people. Napier (1996, 2006) sees this as a reflection of the cultural fetishisation that reinvented the cultural roles of geisha and the idea of *yamato nadeshiko*,[22] and which forces women to abandon their careers and assume the set gender roles of housewife and mother once they have children. Napier (2006) argues thatMiyazaki counters such social enforcement by showing the women in his film not as trophies to be won but as fully rounded individuals, who have their own dreams and senses of agency within the narrative. Even when Fio becomes a prize in the contest of pride between Marco and Curtis, she does so of her own volition because she has utter faith in her aeroplane as well as Marco's skills as a pilot (Napier 2007).

Drazen (2007), conversely, claims that the figure of the female in this film is far more connected with ideas of desire than with any form of freedom or agency. Specifically, Drazen (2007) argues that this can be seen in the original conception of the characters: Gina was intended to be a sultry sex symbol in the style of Marilyn Monroe rather than a lady of elegant refinement and genteel class. Drazen (2007) also suggests that the shifting of Gina from a sexy nightclub singer to an elegant hotel owner had less to do with empowering women and more to do with the practicalities of getting past the then very conservative government censors. Amplifying this, Clammer (2012) argues that the Japanese government attempts to put pressure on media producers to rein in the media's national image, directing them to produce more easily consumed, child-oriented media affected how Miyazaki wrote *Porco Rosso*. Miyazaki (2008:386) himself countered the idea that he had been swayed by such pressure, saying: 'This is not a film for children but rather for middle-aged men frustrated with life for things that they let pass by'. Such a statement seems to contradict what

[22] Literally the 'personification of an idealised Japanese woman' or 'the epitome of feminine purity and beauty'; an idea often used to enforce forms of behaviour and appearance for Japanese women based on a form of femininity that reflects a nationalised ideal.

Miyazaki had previously said about personal freedom and gender equality, though Ross (2010) reminds us that Miyazaki is often discrepant in his own ideas and opinions, able to juxtapose many contradictions without confusing his own work.

Loss, Grief and Responsibility

Napier (2001) also argues that Gina is a figure who represents loss, both in the sense of mortality, having being widowed three times, as well as a loss of naïve innocence. Rustin and Rustin (2012) argue that introducing Gina through the death of her third husband is important because it acquaints the audience with the notion of the loss and grief that has not only affected the majority of the film's characters but also the age in which they live. Critic Mark Schilling (1992), who was highly dismissive of the film as a whole, describing Gina as being dislikeable because 'she is presented as emotionally cold and distant, not truly concerned over the death of another husband' because she 'seems to long for the past and her unrequited love for Marco, leaving her uncaring for anything else'. Napier (2001) and Cavallaro (2006) argue that Gina is not such a figure − a frigid woman who is obsessed with the past − but rather represents a mature, pragmatic approach to loss that could only be taken by someone who has endured the hardships of war. Napier (2001) further argues that Gina's stoicism and need to remember the past stems from a form of survivor's guilt, having outlived not only her husbands but so many other friends who died in the war. Rustin and Rustin (2012) argue that this idea of survivor's guilt and the (in)ability to deal with loss also carries over to Marco and his mysterious curse. This inability to accept and deal with loss speaks to the psyche of post-War Japan and the nation's inability to come to terms with its own damaging role in global history, such as the atrocities committed by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II as well as those inflicted upon Japan with the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the post war occupation by US forces.

The Pig and the Fairy Tale

Over the course of the film, it is never made explicit how Marco was turned into a pig. Marco tells Fio the story of how, after a dogfight against an Austro-Hungarian squadron, he found himself in a field of clouds with a strange band above him. As his plane flew itself, Marco witnessed his squad-mates rise out of the clouds alongside their Austro-Hungarian opponents, all flying towards the band above. This band was actually thousands of aircraft, flown by the

souls of pilots who died in flight and combat. As he realised who they were, Marco saw his friend Berlini, Gina's first husband, rise past him. As he screamed for Berlini to come back so Marco can take his place, his plane sank back below the clouds. Marco then blacked out and when he awoke he had become an anthropomorphic pig. Yet, as Cavallaro (2006, 2011) argues, even though there is no definitive reason given for this transformation, its explanation is referred to in both the visuals and the narrative.

In Western cultures, the pig is seen as an unclean animal associated with greed, whereas in Buddhism 'the pig symbolises human imperfection' (Cavallaro 2006:97). This echoes many of the themes in the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*[23] (*Saiyūki* in Japanese) and the character of Pigsy. Cavallaro argues that in *Saiyūki*, Pigsy represents human imperfections, whereas in *Porco Rosso*, Marco more represents a rejection and critique of the human traits of violence and greed. Napier (2007) argues that Marco actively rejects many human social conventions yet indulges in its material necessities out of practicality and in order to demonstrate human hypocrisy. Ross (2010) contends, on the other hand, that Marco's transformation is merely a fairy tale trope, while Rustin and Rustin (2012) argue that the metamorphosis is more linked to trauma than to fairy tale conventions. More specifically, Rustin and Rustin (2012) claim that Marco is suffering from a form of post-traumatic stress disorder after having survived when all his comrades died. Cavallaro (2006) further adds that Marco has actually cursed himself into becoming a pig, partly because he rejects the horror that humans create and partly because he cannot escape the human world or accept his own failure to protect those he loved.

Miyazaki's other narratives are mostly about children growing into maturity by taking responsibility for their actions and for those around them, whereas Marco begins the film as an adult who is conflicted about how to deal with the responsibility he feels towards those who have died. Marco's narrative journey is not the same as the one Chihiro undertakes in *Spirited Away* [see **Chapter 5**]; rather Marco's journey is about how a person accepts their own humanity, with all their faults and failings, and take control during a period when – to paraphrase Dante – they find themselves lost in the middle stage of their life.

[23] A novel attributed to Wu Cheng'en, and popularised in the West, to a large extent, by the BBC's dub of the Japanese television series *Saiyūki* (1978-80) as *Monkey (Magic)*.

Napier (2001) adds to this argument by spelling out what is symbolised when Marco gives Fio to Gina so they can escape the approaching fascist air force at the end of the film. Fio wishes to join Marco in living an unfettered life but Marco says such things are not for her because she has so much to live for in the future. By handing her to Gina, Marco is, in a way, giving Fio her freedom: the freedom to choose who and what she can be, instead of being a criminal, forever hunted by a brutal conformist system. In this fashion, Marco can be seen as taking responsibility for her, accepting that the past cannot be changed and that the future is where people should instead live. Marco's fate and future is left intentionally ambiguous, but the film's coda shows that Fio has taken control of her own life, achieving her dream of becoming an aircraft designer – which she is thankful to Marco for (Fretwell 2012).

Even though so many academics, critics and audiences cannot agree on the major themes of *Porco Rosso*, they do admit that an overall confluence of themes exists. Cavallaro (2006) and Bigelow (2009) both argue that the interweaving of themes and images is intended by Miyazaki to better deliver his message, whereas Moist and Bartholow (2007) and Drazen (2007) contend that Miyazaki is more preoccupied with filmcraft as a technical exercise, rather than with being someone who sermonises or condemns an ideology. Moist and Bartholow (2007) further argue that the film's message is of the power and beauty of cinema, while Napier (2001, 2007) affirms that, to Miyazaki, cinematics and themes cannot be separated. The majority agree, however, that the film wishes to express its (and, by extension, Miyazaki's) desire to show that all freedom comes with responsibility. Miyazaki, according to Fretwell (2012), has always been critical of the lack of responsibility taken by society in general and by the government (as well as other enactors and investors) in particular. Especially, according to Rustin and Rustin (2012), in the film's promotion of an ultra-masculine image to cover up social traumas, such as the post-War occupation and the growing economic instability of the first half of the 1990s.

'I'd rather be a pig than a fascist':

How *Porco Rosso* Seeks to Subvert

First planned as a short film adaption of Miyazaki's manga *Hikotei Jidai*[24] for Japan Airlines, production began shortly before the Lost Decade but was still affected by the early upsets of that period. Moist and Bartholow (2007) contend that the changes in the socio-political status quo of the period meant that Miyazaki gave the film a more entertaining, farcical flavour, incorporating elements of classic slapstick and escapist fantasy in order to offer a discontented populace a panacea to placate their woes. Napier (2001, 2007) and Cavallaro (2006), in contrast, argue that it was these same political upheavals that allowed Miyazaki to insert darker social, political and fantasy elements into the film, giving it greater depth for interpretation. Rustin and Rustin (2012) contend that these darker, more subversive elements, which include loss and the repercussions of violence, were deliberately made into key themes of the film because Miyazaki did not wish to patronise his audiences by hiding the reality of trauma from them. A trauma that Japanese society, as a whole, had been avoiding addressing since the rapid, economic and technological changes that the country saw during the boom of the 1960's.

According to Jin (2010) and Miller (2011), it was a sense of trauma that pushed many aspects of Japan's early 1990s national branding agenda. Iwabuchi (2001) argues that in spite of, or possibly due to, the ignoring of consequences, many Japanese corporate investors began to push aggressively into foreign markets in order to strengthen their economic position, while simultaneously, according to Lam (2007), attempting to shelter the Japanese market from foreign goods and media by appealing to a sense of national pride and identity. At the same time, the Japanese government was also pushing its agenda for Japanese national identity by creating a nostalgia-based internal tourism (Valaskivi 2013). This was done by re-appropriating traditional or classic images of Japan, such as iconographic representations of geisha and sumo, to encourage a more positive sense of Japanese history. These programme enactors and investors then used these same faux-traditional images to sell Japan globally as a place of pristine oriental wonder. To achieve this goal, many Japanese enactors and investors, including members of the government, began to put more pressure on the media industry to produce works and merchandise that would either increase brand awareness of Japan or increase the desire of its products (Miller 2011). To this end, the government began to send

[24]. Literally "*Age of the Flying Boat*"

representatives to the various studios in order to pressure them into complying with the emerging branding programme.

Miyazaki (2009:187) recounts a story from when *Porco Rosso* had begun production, when representatives of the Ministry of Trade came to Studio Ghibli offices to try to convince him to join their new initiative:

> I remember four earnest young men had come to see me about something the Ministry had wanted to do. They were all finely dressed and very serious, which made my staff somewhat nervous. After we exchanged business cards we went to the room where we had production meetings. As soon as we had sat down to talk, the senior man of the group bowed austerely and began to weep. He begged me to make films 'for the good of the nation'. His subordinates joined him in this display, all weeping like they were children. I felt bad but I had to turn them down, saying how we [the studio] were already working on several new productions and didn't have the time to work on anything else. Wiping their faces, they thanked us for our time and left. It was all very embarrassing but worrying that they would go so far to [change] our opinion on working for the Ministry.

This strange practice of government persuasion was not uncommon at the time – it was even going on many years later (Stevens 2010). However, Miyazaki was strongly resistant to the notion of any outside enactors, governmental or otherwise, having a controlling hand in his work, because of his personal concerns for the freedom of any creative entity (Napier 2001; Napier 2007; Moist and Bartholow 2007; Ross 2010) – although Moist and Bartholow (2007) make the argument that Miyazaki wished to push for his personal freedom as an auteur rather than for the freedom of the industry as a whole.

In fact, Moist and Bartholow (2007) consider *Porco Rosso* to be a conservative film overall, not in terms of its politics or ideology but rather in its expression. They (2007:2) argue that the film is unwilling to push any boundaries in terms of narrative, politics or themes, rather being content to express the love of film-making, leaving it in the 'middle grounds of

popularity'. Conversely, Napier (2001, 2007) and Cavallaro (2006) quite passionately argue that *Porco Rosso* is a very liberal film, as well as a contemplative piece for men who are reaching the middle stage of their lives. Napier (2001) and Ross (2010) further contend that there are many real world political and ideological allusions in the film, layered deftly upon Miyazaki's passionate argument for more classical visual and narrative forms of film-making, with Cavallaro (2006, 2011) adding that these allusions work against the ideologies of conservative government branding efforts, arguing for the basic form of humanism that permeates all of Miyazaki's works.

Cavallaro (2006; 2011) further argues that this can be seen in how Miyazaki fuses fairy tale tropes with historical, political and social movements, notably the post-World War I setting and the rise of fascism in Europe which, Cavallaro (2006) argues, reflects Miyazaki's stance against the political conservatism of the early 1990s. The film also shows his reaction against the Yugoslav Wars (1991-1999), which Miyazaki (2009) claims so affected him during the production of the film. Cavallaro (2006) goes on to suggest that Marco's pacificistic practices are intentionally placed at the core of the film to reflect Miyazaki's own pacificistic beliefs. Both Cavallaro (2006) and Napier (2007) consider this to be Miyazaki's commentary on the LDP's attempt to rewrite Japan's pacifist constitution to allow for a more aggressive military stance – one that would have led Japan's Self Defence Force (SDF) into the Balkans as part of the UN peacekeeping forces. Miyazaki argued for Japan's right to self-defence but argued against Japanese aggression and a return to the country's militaristic past (Cavallaro 2006; Clammer 2012). Cavallaro (2006) argues that *Porco Rosso* shows a maturity in the idea of the interconnectedness of action, responsibility and honour, and that the film is also a general denouncement of the tragedies of war in all their forms.

Napier (2007), Ross (2010) and Fretwell (2012) also make note of how Miyazaki was concerned over the rise of the extreme Right in Japanese politics, represented by anti-foreign(er) movements and protests, as well as the few ultra-nationalist members of the Diet. Further, Ross (2010) argues that it was this period that helped to foster Miyazaki's attitude of openness to foreign media influences. Cavallaro (2006) and Napier (2007) argue that Miyazaki used films such as *Porco Rosso* as an attempt to bring into question Japan's, and the then government's, view of cultural isolation and exceptionalism. Miyazaki, according to

Fretwell (2012), believed that this was best achieved by producing narratives that are not weighed down by the limitations of a revised Japanese history. Instead, Miyazaki (2009) proposed that films should display a universality in terms of narrative, so that they would speak to people as humans, not to their narrow identities based on place or circumstances of birth. Miyazaki instead argued for the transcendental nature of film, but claimed this to be more effective if it is based on the dominant Hollywood forms (Moist and Bartholow 2007). Napier (2001) and Fretwell (2012) argue that Miyazaki purposely worked against the norms and clichés of Japanese cinema, subverting both social expectations and governmental influence by treating all of his characters – even the lowest of the low – with respect.

Conclusion

While Miyazaki's films preceding *Porco Rosso* tended to focus on young characters who are either finding their place in the world − such as in *My Neighbour Totoro* or *Kiki's Delivery Service* − or challenging the injustices or destruction that are caused by the selfishness of adults − like in *Laputa* or *Nausicaä* − *Porco Rosso* takes on an entirely different route from this standard fairy tale-like formula of youthful adventure and self-discovery. The reason for such a great narrative shift from his earlier films to the story in *Porco Rosso* can be seen in the shift within Japanese society, where many men heading towards middle age found all that they had known crumble away as the economic prosperity and job security that they had always known was no longer there for their children. This challenged their sense of identity and place in the world. Which was made more complicated by many programme enactors and investors pushing ideas of hyper-masculinity and nostalgia as a distraction from the encroaching woes of the 1990's. So what created such a radical shift in narrative tone from youthful adventure to the mature introspection that can be found within *Porco Rosso*?

It is as Miyazaki said: *Porco Rosso* is a film for middle-aged men reflecting on their lives. In that statement can be seen the film's power and popularity and also how it subtly subverts narrative norms. Gone is the energetic, naïve adolescent venturing into a strange world; in their place is a world-weary cynical adult, who also happens to be a pig, clinging to his own sense of honour and pride despite a rapidly changing world. Fretwell (2012) maintains that this is a reflection of Miyazaki himself, a man who was entering his own middle-age,

wondering about his own past and future. Moist and Bartholow (2007) argue that this shift in personal epochs made Miyazaki reflect on his own influences, leading him to make a film that brings together many classic elements of Hollywood and European auteur filmakers so that he can demonstrate his own brilliance – to himself if to no one else. Napier's (2007) argument is that Miyazaki wished to show that it is never too late for someone to find their dreams, and even love, at any stage of their life. Even though the ending of the film remains open, it can still be seen as positive because it shows faith that if you have freedom, you have a future.

It is this sense of faith in the future, as Napier (2001) argues, that truly subverts the governmental branding attempts of the time. Both Miyazaki and *Porco Rosso* refused to focus on a false sense of nostalgia or to dwell in a prideful image of the past. Rather, unlike what Moist and Bartholow (2007:33), attempt to argue, *Porco Rosso* is neither conservative in its approach nor is it 'referencing a more golden time'. Rather, the film is striving, as Cavallaro (2006) contends, to have a stake in the future but also combines the transformative tropes of fairy tales with a historical moment of great change, experimentation and potential. Even though the narrative and visual elements are rooted in the past, they are so because of Miyazaki's passion for the technology of the period rather than because he has said 'wouldn't things be better if they were like this again?' The film is richly imbued with the idea of freedom, yet it is a freedom tempered by responsibility. With *Porco Rosso*, Miyazaki is arguing that a balance must be striven for between the two diametric points, freedom and responsibility, yet that both must exist in an atmosphere of respect and camaraderie.

The same can be said for the ideas of social and gender equality that Miyazaki shows in the film. He argues that all people have potential if you give them the freedom to be the best that they can be, yet for that freedom to be effective, it must be afforded to everyone, regardless of their class, sex or background. Society must be inclusive and people must be afforded basic respect, just as Miyazaki affords every one of his characters respect, no matter their role or appearance. He plays with division, yet shows a unity, a wholeness of people and society when they accept one another and work together despite their differences of personality or opinion. Miyazaki is showing that if you hold true to yourself and your friends and protect

what is precious to you, you can ride out any storm, be it personal or societal, and reach a kind of private happiness that no one can take away from you.

It can be concluded that the strength of *Porco Rosso* as a subversive film lies in the division that it creates. These divisions are not negative, rather they set up different perspectives through which the film can be viewed and debated, giving it layers beyond the superficiality that Moist and Bartholow (2007) say dominates the film, yet not interfering with it being a pleasurable thing to watch. This is because as *Porco Rosso* comfortably flies between these divided interpretations it more easily demonstrates how subversion and entertainment can be fused together without being heavy-handed, nor so light that it becomes insubstantial. The method through which an auteur is able to deliver their message should not remove the emotional investment that an audience puts into a film and its characters. Rather, as Miyazaki illustrates, they can go hand in hand, so the audience can take from the film whichever themes and messages most resonate with them and yet it can also arm them with the ability to question whether or not an ideology is being pushed upon them. *Porco Rosso* presents an optimistic future to the people of Japan, who felt lost during the political and economic shifts of the period. In this film, Miyazaki is telling people not to give in or give up, but to hold true to themselves, their families and communities: to look at the skies and fly towards that promised future.

CHAPTER 5

When Japan Spirited the World Away

An analysis of *Spirited Away*

> In *Spirited Away*, no one waves weapons about or has showdowns using superpowers, but it's still an adventure story. And while an adventure story, a confrontation between good and evil is not the main theme either. This is supposed to be the story of a young girl who is thrown into another world, where good people and bad are all mixed up and coexisting. In this world, she undergoes rigorous training, learns about friendship and self-sacrifice, and using her own basic smarts, somehow not only manages to survive but manages to return to our world.
>
> Miyazaki (2014:197)

This chapter looks at Miyazaki's most commercially successful and popular film, *Spirited Away*. It begins by establishing a context for the film in its historical period before moving on to an analysis of the film's themes and images. These are then broken down into how they are used by Miyazaki to establish his subversion of the various policies and programmes of the time – including, but not limited to, economic policies which were intended to encourage extreme consumption, thus creating a work-debt cycle, as well as Japan's attempted to rebrand itself after a decade of financial disasters and social instability – before concluding with a consideration of how effective this film has been in addressing the various social and economic issues of the period in which it was made.

Introduction

Released in Japan as *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* in 2000, and globally by the Disney Corporation a year later, *Spirited Away* has become one of Japan's most popular and highest grossing films. Lauded by critics as 'one of the most important animated features films of all time,' it has won many international awards, including the Oscar for Best Animated Feature in 2003. However, Napier (2001) argues that, despite such accolades, *Spirited Away* remains

the focus of much debate between academics and fans, with the major discussions concerning the relevance of the film's themes and the issues that the film addresses, especially their validity some fourteen years post-release.

Spirited Away was released at a time when Japan was regaining some of its lost socio-economic confidence, which often came at a high financial cost to individuals. De Mente (2013) cites various studies on how the Lost Decade led to destabilisation in the previously secure areas of lifelong employment and job identity. The younger generation lost faith in the occupation-for-life system that their parents had grown up with, preferring to pick up casual work because it was too difficult to secure full time employment (De Mente 2013), a problem that was worsened by education becoming more driven by hierarchical results, having been designed to create a sense of social prestige rather than to secure stable employment. Iwabuchi (2002) argues that this led to a form of nationalised narcissism that pushed marketable forms of nostalgia and branded identity as the paradigms of being and as means by which to escape the mundanity of everyday existence. Napier (2006) contends that several anime studios attempted to apply a media-based panacea to this social listlessness but were, instead, often co-opted into pushing corporate agendas of hyper-consumption and product-based branded identity.

Identifying the Themes

The literature on *Spirited Away* identifies a number of themes that appear to be the core concepts that Miyazaki wished to express. These range from issues of socio-economic identity to environmentalism and to the interconnected nature of the human psyche with both the spiritual and natural worlds.

Napier (2006:469) focuses her discussion on social and media history, as well as discussing what she feels are Miyazaki's critiques of Japan's political and economic stances and of the Japanese sense of 'identity upon a global stage'. Napier (2001:468) provides a brief examination of how Japanese media have 'rewritten history' and 'constructed a national identity'. Moreover, Napier (2001:470) argues that this has been done through constructions of visual nostalgia in line with the notion of 'Japanese exceptionalism', to which Miyazaki offered his films as a strong critique. Her 2006 article identifies the themes of the film: self-

identity and agency, nostalgia, the loss of connection and the use of global narratives to enhance a culturally-specific story.

In Reider's (2005) view, the film is more focussed on traditional mythology, superstitions and reinterpretations of the supernatural in Japanese society. She contends that the themes of the film are concerned with a sense of spiritual connection and regaining a sense of self, family and overall community. Reider (2005) also contends that all the supernatural elements of the film are allegories for, or have direct parallels with, the human world, so that what occurs in one directly affects the other.

Suzuki (2009:2) identifies *Spirited Away* as a commentary on what she dubs "extreme consumer culture". Suzuki (2009:1) describes the film as a 'child's survival story [that] is intertwined with a denunciation of today's capitalist mindset'. Suzuki (2009:7) directs readers towards the idea that 'the more material gain […] we have, the more it shows what we have lost'. Additionally, her article also focuses on issues of the dehumanising and disconnecting nature of modern capitalism, disconnecting us, specifically, from our families and self-identities. Suzuki (2009) also traces the roots of these issues in modern day Japan to events that occurred during Japan's Lost Decade, outlining how she thinks Miyazaki wishes to repair the damage done to society by people solely concentrating on the material and neglecting the natural, the spiritual and the familial.

Analysing the Film's Themes and Images

View of Extreme Consumerism

Suzuki (2009:2) states that Miyazaki's primary concern in *Spirited Away* is to critique 'the Japanese obsession with extreme consumer based capitalism', as seen in Chihiro's parents' luxury items, like their Audi sedan and designer fashion. Suzuki (2009) argues that Chihiro's father's urge to explore stems from his wish to indulge in the power of his expensive car, with little concern for the safety of his family or the perilousness of their path. After that brief misadventure, Chihiro and her parents stumble into a potent symbol of Japan's Bubble Economy: an abandoned theme park. In reality, they have stumbled into Aburaya, an aspect of the spirit world, which overlaps our mundane reality. Aburaya is filled with businesses

such as restaurants, instantly giving a familiar yet otherworldly feel to both Chihiro's family and the audience. Napier (2006) and Suzuki (2009) note the importance of the design being based upon the Westernised aesthetics of the Meiji Period (1868-1912) with the addition of modern concessions such as electric lights and signs. Suzuki (2009) argues that these designs invoke a sense of nostalgia for Japan's post-occupation economic boom period and for the socio-economic security that it provided. Suzuki (2009) and Lim (2013) further contend that these buildings depict a foreign-imported decadence that is often associated with affluence, paralleling Chihiro's parents' own decadence in their designer clothing and foreign-made car. To further the spirit world's link with nostalgia and decadence, Napier (2006) notes how the restaurants are all centred on a towering *yuya* (bathhouse), which is often seen in Japanese culture as a connection to a communal past. Yet this *yuya*, as Suzuki (2009) points out, is shown more as an onsen[25], removing the traditional communal connection associated with *yuya*, transforming it into a business. This luxury business is the hub of activity within that part of the spirit world; where many varieties of *kami* and *yokai*[26] come to the *yuya* to enjoy cleansing, food, as well as other services – as long as they can afford to pay for them (Suzuki 2009). Miyazaki (2014:217-218) states that he is depicting 'Japan itself' by fusing the working dormitories with the extravagance of the *yuya* and making the entire building a 'mishmash of a traditional-style palace, a grand Western-style (or quasi-Western-style) mansion, and something like the Palace of the Dragon King'. Miyazaki (2014:218) adds the idea of the decadence and design influences of the *yuya*: 'The Aburaya bathhouse, I should say, really is like one of today's leisure land theme parks, but it's something that could also have existed in the Muromachi and Edo periods. So what we're ultimately depicting is the real Japan'.

Suzuki's (2009) concern is also with ideas of social class, comparing Chihiro's work-based role/identity of Sen to the extreme side of the modern (domestic) servant class. Each class group has a physical position within the *yuya*, which they fiercely defend against outsiders like Chihiro/Sen, whose very presence disrupts their imposed order and structures. Suzuki

[25] Literally "hot spring", but also refers to hotels connected to such springs that serve traditional food; often seen as a quintessentially Japanese place to stay.

[26] Gods/spirits and lower nature or object spirits.

(2009) considers the rigid hierarchy within the *yuya* to be a reflection of Japanese capitalist society as a whole, with the *Susuwatari*[27] and Kamaji (the labourers who toil to keep the boiler alive, providing the *yuya* with all of its power and heat) representing the lowest rung of the class structure. The *Yuna* and the *Aogaeru*[28] fulfil the roles of traditional *Ukiyo*[29] servants, who are a more privileged working class able to indulge in material goods. Yubāba stands at the highest point above them all, both figuratively and literally, representing the bourgeois ruling class obsessed with the trappings of wealth and power. Suzuki (2009) argues that Chihiro's progression through each floor of the *yuya* is shown so that the audience can bear witness to how Miyazaki views the structure of the capitalist class system. Miyazaki does this by giving every class of occupant of the *yuya* a location in which they belong: from the workers in the lower reaches to Haku and Yubāba's positions of authority at the very top of the building.

Suzuki (2009) further contends that each floor represents a different level of capitalist society; making it symbolic when Chihiro, having reclaimed her identity, leaves the *yuya* with Kaonashi chasing after her. Chihiro reverses her journey, descending each level as she sheds her identity as Sen. Kaonashi mirrors her progression by expelling the excesses of his consumption, returning him to his ephemeral state, thus freeing them both from enslavement to the *yuya* as well as of the extremes of consumer culture.

Role of the Feminine

Napier (2006:474) argues that Miyazaki's ability to create female characters who 'are remarkable for taking charge of their own lives' is a primary reason for the popularity of his films. Napier (2001, 2007) adds that it is Miyazaki's ability to put himself at the forefront of

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[27] Literally "Wandering Soot"; small animate pieces of soot or dirt. Created by Miyazaki for *My Neighbour Totoro* to explain how dirt is spread around old houses but depicted as slave creatures in *Spirited Away*.

[28] *Yuna* are female slug spirits and the *Aogaeru* are male frog spirits; both are common in Japanese myth as lowly servants of the gods.

[29] The Floating World, an urban lifestyle focussed on pleasure-seeking that flourished during the Edo Period.

discourses on the role of the feminine in films that has seen audiences put him in the front rank of auteurs who challenge the dominant ideologies of gender.

Napier (2006) contends that Chihiro owns a unique space in Miyazaki's pantheon of characters because she begins the narrative as unlikeable and immature. Miyazaki (2014:205) wanted her to be as realistic as possible despite *Spirited Away* being a fantasy tale, and he claims that this realism rings true because: 'The girl's a brat, frankly. And most real young girls I know at that stage might be described much the same way'. This is echoed by Rumi Hiirage, the (then) 13 year old voice actress of Chihiro, who said of the character: "She is wilful and spoiled, very much like girls today. I think that she is a bit like me' (*Animage* 2001). When prodded as to why he would create such a character, Miyazaki replied:

> I read the *shoujo* [sic] manga such as *Nakayoshi* or *Ribon* which they left at my mountain cabin. I felt this country only offered such things as crushes and romance to 10-year-old girls, though, and looking at my young friends, I felt this was not what they held dear in their hearts, not what they wanted. And so I wondered if I could make a movie in which they could be heroines. (*Animage* 2001)

Napier (2001:470) states that creating Chihiro as 'an ordinary girl facing up to an impossible situation' was a reaction against the typical *shōjo*[30] as being 'feminine, innocent and cute'. Napier (2006:473) further states that Chihiro is far removed from the 'dreamy, nurturing, and ultimately passive heroines' of the media of the 1990s because she is 'one who wants to protect, not be protected'. It is through these ideas, Napier (2006) contends, that Miyazaki lays out his rejection of many of the concepts of self and national branding as well as of the reinforcement of the roles of the amorphous female in society that programme enactors desired to invoke. Napier (2006:308) argues that Miyazaki did this through his 'rejection of traditional media tropes as found in *shōjo* and film', placing his female protagonists in positions of importance and action; action that is absent from the passive, submissive and victimised tropes that are so prevalent in the *shōjo* genre.

[30] A genre directed towards girls ranging from 10 to 16 years in age, usually filled with stories of romance and imposed feminine identity and ideals.

The Transformative Idea of Consumption

Wright and Clode (2005) state that things in Miyazaki's films are always in a state of change – either physically transformed from one form to another or in a process of emotional maturation. Napier (2006:305) states that, in *Spirited Away*, this trope is manifested in Kaonashi, who becomes 'an embodiment of consumer greed' when he devours other characters so he can indulge in all of the consumptive acts that the *yuya* offers. Reider (2005) and Lim (2013) further argue that Kaonashi consumes in order to fill the emptiness that is inherently part of his being, with Saito (2001:59) similarly stating that 'he is a pathetic creature who has no self, and he can only communicate through the voice of someone that he has swallowed'. This over-consumption leads Kaonashi to a destructive rampage when his true desire, the company and affection of Chihiro, is denied him. The only way he can return to normal is for him to expel all that he has consumed, after Chihiro feeds him magical medicine, bringing him near to physical nothingness once again (Reider 2005).

Napier (2006) suggests that Chihiro's first transmogrification comes when Yubāba takes her name and seals away the memories of her true identity. Napier (2006:293), on the matter of transformations in the film more generally, argues that they are all 'connected to various forms of consumption'. Napier (2006:305) further argues that the transmutations of Chihiro's parents and Kaonashi are based on 'transgressive consumption' – eating that which they should not. Lim (2013:157) draws a similar conclusion about Yubāba's shape-shifting, arguing that it stems from her 'need to satisfy her excessive greed and obtain more material wealth'. Lim (2013:158) further reasons that Chihiro's personal transformation comes from her 'regulated consumption', her refusal of the excesses of the *yuya* and thus denying the corruptive nature of consumerism.

In fact, a transformation that is often unaddressed is the importance of how Chihiro's name – thus her entire identity – is transformed into Sen by Yubāba. Suzuki (2009) contends that it is merely a way of transforming Chihiro into a subservient worker, by removing her connections to her former identity and her past, whereas Reider (2005) believes that it is part of the magic of Shinto, where possessing the name of a person or object grants the possessor utter control over every aspect of their being. These contentions must not be dismissed

because they are, from their own points of view, correct, yet they do not address the core of Miyazaki's view of how societal forces attempt to impose identity constructs on individuals and groups. As Miyazaki (2014:198) himself says: 'Appropriating another's name does not equate to just changing your name; it is a way of completely controlling the other person', meaning that once a person gives up their identity – either willingly or unwillingly – those who took their name gain control over that person's identity and actions.

One of the reasons many academics overlook this aspect stems from a lack of acknowledgement of the name of the film in Japan: *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*[31]. Here the emphasis is placed upon both names, which, according to Reider (2005), made the Japanese audience consider that there were actually two central protagonists. Lapointe (2010:35) notes how much of the Japanese audience felt 'challenged' and 'intrigued' by Chihiro's dual identity. Lapointe (2010) contends that this is partly because much of the Japanese audience recognised Chihiro's duality as part of the Japanese socio-economic construction that people have two personas, the first private – for family and close friends where one does not have to put up a façade – the second based on a person's social identity, which comes from education, social class and even their family lineage. According to Hiroki (2001), Chihiro's re-identification as Sen was seen by the audience as paralleling the Japanese social-identity construct of the salaryman[32], which is key to the Japanese-identification mentality of work-to-consume. Simply put, a person gives up their personal/private identity for a socio-corporate one in order to maintain their materialistic lifestyle. This loss of identity, according to Suzuki (2009), is intended to help them maintain their materialistic lifestyle in order to fill the void left by their identity's removal. Suzuki (2009) argues that this lies at the heart of Japanese social policy: removing personal identity for the sake of the consensus in order to perpetuate a materialistic lifestyle.

At the beginning of the film, the only form of identity that Chihiro possesses is her name – written on the card from her former classmates – and her relationship with her parents, which,

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[31] *The Spiriting Away of Sen and Chihiro.*

[32] A form of white-collar worker who is employed in a corporate environment. Also carries the connotation of stressful, underpaid work and conditions that have led to individuals being literally worked to death.

as Napier (2006) points out, is not a supportive or nurturing one. Hiroki (2001) argues that the Japanese audience recognised that Yubaba's taking of Chihiro's name is symbolic of the process of maturation, in which an individual replaces their personal identity with a work/corporate identity. Further, Suzuki (2009) contends that the process of identity exchange is not like that of pre-Lost Decade Japan, where a person's work became their identity, but is rather more symbolic of replacing a personal identity with a consumer one. In a way, Suzuki (2009) is arguing, work is solely a way to repay the debts that the consumer lifestyle incurs. Clammer (2011) contends that it was in the Lost Decade that Japanese people increased their materialistic consumption in order to prop up a failing economy by going further into personal debt, creating a spiralling cycle of constant debt and overwork to both repay and maintain the appearance of a positive consumer lifestyle. Both Napier (2006) and Suzuki (2009) posit that Chihiro's regaining of her true name not only represents her regaining her own identity through a process of maturation but also represents her breaking her dependence on the consumption-based lifestyle of her parents.

Consumerism, Connection, Debt and Identity

Napier (2006:308) states that 'Miyazaki knows that consumer culture cannot be radically altered or destroyed because of how closely it is connected with a sense of personal identity'. Instead it must be tempered with 'a close connection to the values that have been forgotten'. Napier (2006) states that this is particularly symbolised by Chihiro's consumption of the *onigiri*[33] given to her by Haku and her tearful reaction to eating it. Napier (2006:307) says this is because it is a 'culturally specific food' that, quoting Allison (1996:145-146), has connotations of being 'evocative of a mother's love for and efforts on behalf of her young child'. This evocation is, however, rebuked by Napier (2006:307), who writes: 'We remember Chihiro's lack of nurturance from her real mother, whose only reply to Chihiro's reaching for her in the tunnel is to admonish her not to "cling"'. So Napier (2006) is arguing that Chihiro is not only crying for what she has lost by entering Aburaya, but also for what she never had as a result of the modern capitalist construct's removal of any close connection to her family. Both Reider (2005) and Napier (2006) argue that the absence of her parents, physically and emotionally, means Chihiro lacks any traditional social/familial structures

[33] Rice balls, often stuffed with a flavouring agent and partially wrapped in dried seaweed.

upon which to build her basic identity. Furthermore, as noted by Napier (2006), without any familial guidance, Chihiro is left in a moral and cultural void, where she is forced to construct her own sense of identity through self-determination, rather than being handed a role to perform.

Napier (2001) and Suzuki (2009) argue that the fact that Chihiro's parents are turned into pigs is not some mere fairy tale cliché, but is actually a representation of the capitalist view of the consumer: that consumers are no longer individual humans but rather a kind of livestock commodity who have not only exchanged their humanity for personal greed but have done so to perpetuate a system that not only consumes them but forces them into debt in order to maintain itself. It should also be noted that the image of the pig in *Spirited Away* is vastly different from the one in *Porco Rosso*. Whereas in the earlier film Miyazaki attempts to show the nobility and suffering of a human through his transmogrification into a human-pig hybrid, in *Spirited Away* the image of the pig is transformed into an allegory for excessive consumption and how, through over-consumption, we ourselves as human beings are in turn consumed. Miyazaki (2014:217) himself once jokingly replied when asked about the different symbolism of the pig in the two films: 'There were lots of people like that during Japan's economic bubble years, and after. They're still around today. There are brand-name pigs, and rare-item snob pigs'. This is an echo of the constant threat that Chihiro faces in the Spirit World for, as Miyazaki (2014:198) says: 'In Yubāba's world, one must always live with the constant threat of being completely devoured', either literally being turned into food, or allegorically having your entire identity devoured by an uncaring system in order for it to perpetuate itself.

Suzuki (2009) argues that giving Chihiro's parents the role of upwardly mobile middle class consumers, who place material comfort over personal connections and responsibility, was an intentional act by Miyazaki to criticise the social branding of the time. Niskanen (2010) and Lim (2013) agree that this criticism was reinforced by their visual representations, being dressed in stylish fashion, as well as believing that they can buy their way out of any difficulties that they might encounter – something that much of the adult Japanese audience would have realised was a reflection of their own lives. Lives which force them to give up their humanity and pass their debt onto their children, much like Chihiro's parents

unintentionally did to her. Inherited debt was a strong concern for many Japanese during the Lost Decade (Nygren 2007; De Mente 2013) but, as Suzuki (2009) points out, people took on debt to hide the shame of not being able to maintain their social positions and lifestyles. Suzuki (2009) and Lim (2013) argue that debt, and recovery from debt, became a marker of social identity – which the persona of Sen represents on screen.

Identity through Responsibility

Napier (2001) argues that one of Miyazaki's greatest contentions with Japanese society – and the individuals that make it up – is its inability to take responsibility for its actions, be they personal, corporate or governmental. Napier (2001, 2007) contends that this strange social norm, referred to as *higaisha ishiki* ('victim mentality'), is something that Miyazaki took personal umbrage with because it does not allow for the individual or society to move on from a real or imagined past. Whilst practices such as *higasisha ishiki* have long been ingrained within Japanese society and history, it truly came to the fore in social practice during the US occupation following Japan's defeat in World War II; primarily because it helped deflect the feeling of humiliation that Japan felt at their lost as well being forced radical political and social changes forced on them by the US. These feelings were heightened in the early 1960's when Japan wanted to recreate it their sense of history and place in the world, partly through the use of *Nihonjinron* but also by reinventing their history so they became the victim of the Allied war machine rather than the aggressors. This idea of *higaisha ishiki* existed to such an extent in Japan's society that to address it, every one of Miyazaki's works has protagonists who take responsibility for not only themselves but also for the actions of those they love in order to improve the world. Napier (2001) contends that this stands in stark contrast to the ideologies that various enactors attempt to foster in Japan which give excuses for past misdeeds and shift the blame – within Japan – to other social groups or to foreign nations so that the Japanese do not have to accept their own failings.

Reider (2005) and Napier (2006) further point out that, throughout the film, Chihiro creates her own sense of action and agency by never backing down from any difficulty presented and by owning up to her mistakes. Napier (2006) argues that she does not do this to reach a self-serving goal or reward, but because she feels they are the correct actions for the given situation. Reider (2005) feels this to be exemplified by Chihiro's attempts to save Haku after

he is attacked by Zeniba's *shikigami*[34] by climbing up the outside of the *yuya*. Reider (2005) contends that Chihiro's recognition of her personal agency and sense of action is symbolised by her fastening up her sleeves with a cord because, according to Japanese tradition, this is recognised as someone displaying their determination to complete a task.[35] Napier (2006) further argues that this determination to do right according to a personal moral code is also demonstrated by Chihiro's decision to remove Kaonashi from the *yuya*; Chihiro recognises herself as the cause of his rampage and the enabler of his over-consumption. Napier (2006) takes the position that Chihiro's journey to Zeniba's house to beg forgiveness for Haku's transgressions symbolises the final stages of Chihiro's development of a full form of self-identity. Reider (2005) affirms this, arguing that it comes about because Chihiro shows the maturity to take responsibility not only for her mistake with Kaonashi but for the actions of another in order to help save and redeem them.

After beginning the film as an emotionally immature, materialistic child who is reliant on but ultimately distant from her parents, Chihiro is able to establish her own form of identity and agency through a combination of diligence, moral fortitude and positive emotional connection to those around her. It can be argued that Chihiro ends the film not as a 'fully rounded proto-adult', as Hoshina (2012:18) refers to her, but rather, as Suzuki (2009) contends, that she has the potential to develop outside a nationalist or capitalist construct because she has rediscovered lost connections not only to other people but also within herself.

The Subversion of Control

Against Nostalgia

Napier (2006:291) states that *Spirited Away* is a continuation of Miyazaki's rejection of the 'nostalgia pushed by the government for a time and place that never existed within Japan'.

[34] Familiars, often spiritual servants magically bonded to their summoner, but can also be simple constructions made from paper talismans given life through spiritual energy to carry out simple commands.

[35] An act that is linked to samurai tradition, where warriors would use the cord from their scabbards to tie back their sleeves before combat.

Stevens (2010:8) points out that this references an earlier promotion by the Japanese government to get the Japanese people reinvested in their own society and culture by using nostalgia built upon 'iconic imagery of Japanese history and culture'. Reider (2005:8) contends that Miyazaki twists such iconography by setting *Spirited Away* in a bathhouse, a kind of place that is referred to by De Mente (2013:118) as a 'bastion of Japanese nostalgia and history'. Napier (2006:289) supports this position by saying that 'the culture of the bathhouse [is] a memorable vision of a distinctively "Japanese" collectivity. But the film is far more than a facile homage to local culture, since so much of its action stems from the fragility and permeability of the cultural identity it privileges'. Napier (2006:288) argues that this is a representation of the notion that 'nostalgic images are used to replace cultural and historical perspective', stripping them of their cultural context, transforming them into a marketing tool. Miyazaki (2001:50) believes that policies such as national branding, as well as policies in many other areas, like education, as dictated by successive Japanese governments, aims to 'strip [away] the Japanese peoples' connection to their true history'. Cavallaro (2006) claims this is a comment on Japanese society's denial of its recent history, as well as on its particular form of *higaisha ishiki* tainted with a sense of national exceptionalism. Whereas Napier (2006:300) says this form of exceptionalism and denial of the recent past exists because they allow people to 'conform to a false sense of cultural identity'. In contrast, Miyazaki (2009:20) has formally stated that he feels this form of exceptionalism is constructed from 'a sense of nostalgia that never existed, bending the Japanese psyche to an ideology that is driven by power not history or personal identity'.

The Subversion of the Role of the Female Protagonist

Napier (2006) further seeks to display Miyazaki's rejection of that era's national branding direction by showing how the director subverted popular narratives and character tropes. This is done by taking the established forms of the *shōjo* genre, with young female characters that are passive and vulnerable to outside influences, and whose only reward for enduring such hardships is a romantic outcome that maintains traditionally subservient gender roles. Napier (2006:296) argues, conversely, that *shōjo* characters are often beset by various external agents that force them to take 'dark and damaging introspectives, becoming victims as they abandon their personal agency to "fate"'. In defiance of these tropes, Miyazaki gives Chihiro

a strong sense of personal agency that exists outside of narrative necessity, which allows her to seek out a new personal identity. Napier (2006:297) considers this to be important because:

> It has to do with an increasing sense of vulnerability and fragility on the part of the Japanese towards their own culture in the 1990s as the economic juggernaut that powered Japan through most of its post-war years began to sputter and collapse. In this climate of social, economic, and political instability, the iconic figure of a vulnerable young girl, either fighting back or internalizing various dark psychological problems, may have had a particular cultural resonance.

Miyazaki (2009:270) saw this idea of Japan represented by a fragile young girl 'creating the mentality of a victim nation' because it creates an idea of Japan that must be 'sheltered and protected from anything that threatens its sense of security' as being a fundamentally wrong ideology. Miyazaki felt that the government, and the nation as a whole, were seeking an external source of their discontent to blame so as to avoid losing their national sense of exceptionalism. Iwabuchi (2002:456) argues that the then government's response to this perceived national identity crisis was to promote a form of 'material nostalgia' in their branding policy. This was based on a greater consumption of reinvented and revitalised commercial products and media. The programme enactors and investors also used similar methods to recreate the Japanese man, whom they felt was slipping from social prominence. Lim (2013:154) posits that they did this by creating male characters who were 'stoically individual, violent, in total control of themselves and their surroundings, not reliant on feminine emotion or non-masculine pursuits'. Lim (2013) sees this as an attempt to establish societal conventions, social and familial relationships, as well as work/corporate structures based on a false nostalgia, or on ideologies that had never actually existed within Japanese society. Napier (2006) strongly argues that Miyazaki's rejection of such characterisations and narratives are the core of *Spirited Away*; Miyazaki places a young girl at the heart of the narrative who must develop her own sense of identity in opposition to the rampant consumerism of the time. Chihiro does not assume a masculine role in order to overcome adversity, yet neither is she passive, waiting for others to save her like a typical *Shōjo* heroine. Such adversities include the shallow materialism of Chihiro's parents that

transformed them into pigs and Yubāba's greed that prevents her from seeing that her son, too, has been transformed and temporarily replaced with a doppelganger. Further as Cavallaro (2006) writes, Miyazaki seeks to satirise the programme enactors' and investors' attempts to foist their version of traditional Japanese social roles onto both the national and international stage. Ideally, as Suzuki (2009) contends, Miyazaki wished to demonstrate the destruction that extreme consumerism leads to, not only of the environmental or spiritual aspects, but also of an individual's sense of identity. This interpretation is reinforced by Lim's (2013) argument that resolution can only be found by embracing what capitalism rejects, and through this Chihiro achieves personal growth as well as preparation for entering the cruel adult world of work and material possessions.

Conclusion

As outlined above, the academic discourses surrounding *Spirited Away* individually seek to highlight the inherent strengths of the film, and, in turn, Miyazaki's own criticism of how the various programme enactors and investors sought to push their new socio-economic agenda. Yet these individual arguments can also form an aggregation, with each part reinforcing the others – strengthening the core argument for Miyazaki's subversion. These arguments for Miyazaki's stance against hyper-consumerism and the price of personal/social degradation to rebuild a broken economy, fall into the following three categories.

First, as Napier (2006) contends, that Miyazaki created *Spirited Away* because he wanted to challenge the prevalent tropes in the media of the 1990s, especially the programme enactors and investors' approach to *shōjo* narratives as well as their reliance on invented nostalgia. Additionally, Miyazaki also wished to criticise the 'pollution, literal and figurative, of extreme capitalism' (Suzuki 2009:4), as well as the disconnection that this creates within individuals and society as a whole.

Second, as Lim (2013) contends, that Miyazaki's films can be seen as his personal reflections upon the modern world's lack of a true connectedness with the natural and spiritual worlds, but also that in order to move forward and re-establish that connection, we (as a societal collective) must not dwell in a nostalgic past. Suzuki (2009) asserts that Miyazaki's

productions, especially *Spirited Away*, help to lay out what the director feels are the pathways back to that forgotten sense of connectivity, as well as demonstrating what we, as human beings, have lost when we become trapped by a false sense of nostalgia.

Third, as Reider (2005) asserts, the power of *Spirited Away* exists as a critique of the lack of a spiritual core of being. This core does not have to be based on any faith or religion but rather is expressed as a state of being that transcends the notion of otherness. This otherness applying to anything that is different or strange, making it seem almost unhuman in appearance and habits. Reider (2005) argues that to return to a spiritual centre a person must establish a basic form of connection, one that begins with the idea of nature itself and extends out to other groups and individuals to help us become who we should be, not who society tells us to be.

Individually, each is a strong argument for Miyazaki's and his film's critique and subversion of many socio-economic policies and programmes – especially around branding – yet when synthesised together they prove that all these individual threads are actually part of the single tapestry that is *Spirited Away*. Miyazaki's critique of hyper-consumerism cannot exist without the argument that modern society destroys a sense of connection and community. The same can be said of the argument that extreme capitalism destroys any sense of personal identity, replacing it with a branded, product-based construction; this, however, cannot be seen unless it is considered with the argument that certain forms of work help to inform and build a person's own sense of self, free from socially imposed labels.

Spirited Away also saw Miyazaki return to the youthful adventure stories that had made him so popular, a style he had taken back up with his only film after *Porco Rosso*, *Princess Mononoke*. Yet despite the reverting of narrative styles, *Spirited Away* continues the more impassioned ideological form that Miyazaki had begun with *Porco Rosso*. In that film Miyazaki addresses issues of trauma, identity and nostalgia in *Porco Rosso* [see **Chapter 4**] and then moves onto ideas of the natural and spiritual worlds and abandoning the cyclic curse of hatred in *Princess Mononoke*, therefore *Spirited Away* becomes the synthesis and evolution of these previous ideas. Whereas *Porco Rosso* was to aid people who were losing their sense of self in a rapidly changing world, *Spirited Away* is more about forearming a

younger audience against the corruption and transformation that has or might afflict their parents because of the hyper-consumption nature of the world, as well as showing the parents what might happen to them if they indulge too much in material goods at the cost of their children. The scope of the audience may have shifted between *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away* but both films exist as part of a continuing adaption of Miyazaki's subversion of issues within an ever changing world.

By seeing the aforementioned arguments as individual strands or as facets of a whole, it is possible to glean the true strength of Miyazaki's subversion in *Spirited Away*. In actively rejecting the national branding discourses, which mostly consist of a radicalised form of nationalism, increased consumerism and the following of the societal consensus that had been put in place by programme enactors and investors, Miyazaki can be seen as setting up his own form of branding. Specifically, this branding is geared towards openness and connection, not just within Japan but globally, based on a spiritual and personal connection with nature as well as reflecting upon the past but not dwelling in it to such an extent that we become lost in nostalgia. Miyazaki (2014:199) does not seek to aggrandise his work, but instead desires to be a provider of wonder — not as an escape from the real world but rather as a stylised reflection of it, where people can let their imaginations loose to 'open up the lid to parts of your brain that you usually don't open'.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

> To give you my frank opinion, I feel that, well, everything comes to an end at some point, even my own life! [*laughs*]
>
> Miyazaki (2014:211)

Summarising the Research Tasks

By focussing on *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away* this thesis has aimed to answer the question: How did Miyazaki's response to Japanese governmental influences upon national branding and soft power affect his films?

The three research tasks are discussed in Chapters 2-5, encompassing: a literature review; an exploration of Miyazaki's films and some of their primary themes; and a textual analysis of *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away.* These overlapping tasks provide the framework for focusing the answer to the research question, which is a synthesis of the conclusions of each chapter.

Chapters 2 demonstrated how national branding and soft power programmes have been used by programme enactors and investors to achieve favourable outcomes for themselves and their programmes. **Chapter 2** also highlighted several key failings of (past and present) national branding and soft power programmes. This chapter also highlighted Miyazaki's relationship to national branding and soft power, showing his importance to the Japanese economy and the various programmes, but also how he did not involve himself directly with the aforementioned programmes.

The discussion of Miyazaki's professional career and filmography in **Chapter 3** illustrated his primary themes and concerns. These were shown by highlighting major events and

productions in his life, as well as the influences that other creative entities had upon him and his work. **Chapter 3** also established the context in which Miyazaki created his themes and characters and why he chose to emphasise certain themes in certain films.

Chapters 4 and **5** assessed and described how *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away* subvert the policies and ideologies of the Lost Decade by drawing on the evidence in academic texts and the films themselves to illustrate Miyazaki's subversive attitudes and themes, showing how Miyazaki used both films as a means to critique the social, economic and media branding of their time. This, as has been argued and demonstrated throughout this thesis, was not by Miyazaki setting himself up as a moral authority but rather by him allowing his audience to place their own moral judgements on what they saw occurring in society around them.

Answering the Question: Miyazaki and Branding/Soft Power

While **Chapter 2** established the context of Japan's national branding and soft power programmes, that chapter's importance can only be seen by considering it in the light of the preceding chapters – beginning with the synthesis of contextualising and answering this thesis' question. Separately, **Chapters 3**, **4**, and **5** can be seen as establishing the forms of subversion which Miyazaki uses in his films. Contextually, the analyses of *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away* can be seen individually as demonstrating how each film critiqued and subverted the national branding and soft power programmes of their periods, yet when melded with the overview of Miyazaki's themes in **Chapter 3**, and the history of branding and soft power in **Chapter 2**, the work can be seen as a whole – one which threads together the evidence for Miyazaki's subversion as well as demonstrating the importance that the films have individually and as a collection of evolving thematic works.

It is the themes of Porco Rosso and Spirited Away that subverted the will of the programme enactors and investors. The various programme enactors and investors aimed to foster a Japanese identity based on national and branded constructs − feelings of superiority, perpetuation of a victim mentality and a sense of self − it is these that Miyazaki is subverting through the use of his themes. These themes exist both within the confines of their respective films but also as a part of Miyazaki's filmography and ideology as a whole, even though, as

has been maintained throughout this thesis, Miyazaki is not an overt critic of Japan's branding and soft power programmes but rather works to help arm his audiences against such explicit agendas.

Chapter 3 established the primary themes that Miyazaki wove into his films. These were found to be: ideas of love and justice; concerns over environmental degradation; the dehumanising nature of the desire for power; conflict and extremism – be they ideological or consumerist in nature; as well as the ideas of community, connection and acceptance of those who are not like yourself. These themes exist in *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away*, yet each film pushes its own representations of them in order to send the message that Miyazaki wished to send.

Within both **Chapter 4** and the film *Porco Rosso*, the primary concern, there can be no doubt, is freedom. Yet it is not a freedom that is absolute, nor is it unfettered by worldly constraints. In *Porco Rosso*, Miyazaki shows that all freedom – be it creative or personal – has limitations; primary among these limitations is that freedom, like respect, must be offered to all, regardless of age or gender, or it must be offered to none, because it is worthless if only enjoyed by a select few. The subversion in the film, primarily enacted through its characters, speaks to how governments and society force us to construct identities and roles around our genders; while Curtis represents the masculine image of pride, arrogance and machismo that programme enactors wished to foist upon Japanese society, Marco, with his compassion, stubbornness and nobility gained through suffering, represents the conflicted form of masculinity that Miyazaki suggests people should follow. The feisty Fio, as well, defies gender norms by designing aeroplanes and taking hold of her life so that no one can dictate who and what she can be. In *Porco Rosso*, Miyazaki granted freedom to women that Japanese society of the period did not, especially as regarded their ability to work. Fio and Gina are not simply objects of sexual desire nor mere damsels to be rescued by an overtly masculine hero; they are both champions of their own agency, possessing freedoms so often and easily denied to members of their sex, standing against the overbearing machismo of Curtis and his ilk. This is the subversion that the film brings: that in accepting and granting respect and freedom to others unlike yourself you are in fact giving yourself the freedom to live your life

unchained by those attitudes which governments and society would force upon you.

This notion of acceptance is carried over into **Chapter 4** and into *Spirited Away*, yet it comes with an entirely different flavour. The subversion that Miyazaki seeks to show in *Spirited Away* is how a person can overcome the dehumanising nature of a system and society mired in the extremities of capitalism. Here we see Chihiro as the victim of this system: lumbered with her parents debt caused by their excessive consumption, stripped of her name and identity and forced to labour to repay a debt not of her own making or risk both herself and her parents being consumed as they themselves did consume. This was something that the audience at the time of the film's release could see as 'real', as part of their everyday lives, as they found themselves stripped of their personal identities and forced to repay the financial burdens of previous governments and institutions, like the banks and construction companies who destabilised the Japanese economy through risky investments and poor management in the face of a looming economic crisis. It is only by accepting responsibility, not only for her transgressions concerning Kaonashi, but also for the actions of Haku and her parents, that Chihiro begins the process of true maturation. Taking responsibility becomes subversion, because Miyazaki saw it as something that governments, society and even individuals were incapable of doing, thus perpetuating a downward spiral of debt and denial. To Miyazaki, taking responsibility is the first step in reconstructing our identities without the branding (both National and product-based) that was pushed by the programme enactors and investors of that period. The subversion in *Spirited Away* exists as a way for the audience to better arm themselves against that which would steal their sense of self and force them into a cycle of over-consumption and debt in order to sustain the extreme and destructive side of what the capitalist system had become.

In looking at the two films, one must see them as a progression and natural evolution of Miyazaki's subtle subversive nature. Before *Porco Rosso*, Miyazaki's films always carried an edge of subversion against the ideologies of the time of their production, yet with that film Miyazaki began a serious critique of many of the ideologies pushed by programme enactors and investors. It began with Miyazaki questioning his own place in the world as middle age approached but soon found that many other people were also questioning their places in the world as all the constants and securities of identity, society and employment fell away when

the economic bubble burst at the beginning of the Lost Decade. This loss of known stability lead the various programme enactors and investors to push their own ideologies of identity and economic purpose in order to restabilise the nation, its economy, its identity and confidence. Yet to Miyazaki, this came at the cost of many things that he felt were important to not only Japanese confidence and identity but to human identity as a whole. As the programme enactors and investors altered their ideologies and approaches throughout the Lost Decade, so did Miyazaki alter what forms of subversion focussed on in his films. This can be seen in how both *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away* play with many fairy tale tropes and imagery, taking what is familiar and turning it into some new and challenging. A confluence of themes also run through both films, as both films address issues of gender equality, nostalgia and personal identity in the face the massive conforming and consuming systems of totalitarian fascism and extreme capitalism. Miyazaki's ability to target his subversion as well as identity in society what ideologies need to be subverted is what give both *Porco Rosso* and *Spirited Away* importance amongst Miyazaki's filmography. Being on two sides of a massive social and economic shift, not only in Japan but globally, we can identify how Miyazaki not only subverts programme enactors and investors but also how he views the views the world and how he wishes to see how it and the people within can becomes. This is done simply done, as in both films, by accepting things and taking responsibility not only for oneself but for those around you so they have the chance for a better future.

So, it can be concluded in answer to the question 'how did Miyazaki's response to Japanese governmental influences upon national branding and soft power affect his films?' that the director's subversion is ultimately the message that we must learn to be accepting of and to take responsibility for. A lack of responsibility, in Miyazaki's mind, is a dangerous thing, and a thing fostered by national branding and soft power programme enactors and investors as a way to distract people from many social and political issues by saying that it is all someone else's fault. This inability to take responsibility for many political and historical actions – especially in regards to education and the environment – coupled with presenting a victim mentality to the world, pushed Miyazaki to react against the system that he perceived to have created these problems. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Miyazaki did not openly attack these enactors or their programmes and products. Miyazaki did not wish to be like those he was criticising, rather he invited his audience to make their own judgements of his work

without shouting at them from the barricades. Miyazaki wished to give people the tools to make up their own minds and to form their own identities, outside the branding that the programme enactors and investors envisioned. It is the subtlety of this subversion that makes Miyazaki's messages all the more powerful and effective.

The Future of Miyazaki's Work and His Ongoing Legacy

McCarthy (2002:8) commented on Miyazaki's 1998 retirement and subsequent return to direction, saying: 'Whatever he [Miyazaki] chooses to do now, his legacy as a film maker is assured'. With his second retirement announcement in 2013, many fans, critics and commentators expressed similar sentiments via social and print media. Arguably, legacy does not equal continued relevance. Rather, to have true relevance, a person or their work must be able to stay engaged with ever-evolving discourses around ideologies and images.

Whatever the case, Miyazaki shall remain relevant to many discussions and arguments because fans, academics and auteurs will continue to refer back to him as a paragon of the animation arts.

Flagging Future Research

From his ongoing legacy alone it can be seen that there are a range of potential research topics to be found in Miyazaki's work for academics to draw upon. For example, Miyazaki's use of meta-themes of personal and social responsibility and how he has constructed relationships and communities within his films; particularly given that Miyazaki's constructions are not in line with the expectations or desires of various programme enactors and investors who possibly wish to see social relationships more narrowly defined and manufactured to fit in with current soft power and (self and national) branding efforts. Research on this topic can also be coupled with a consideration of how foreign enactors and investors have sought to dilute Miyazaki's messages through translation and cultural appropriations of his work, or of works based on/inspired by his.

Also, there are opportunities to expand current discussions of Miyazaki's environmental themes, as well as his views on the roles of women in society. These can be considered in

light of Miyazaki's legacy as an auteur: that is, on how he has influenced his contemporaries as well as those auteurs who have (and will) come after him. Potential studies of Miyazaki's legacy on social discourses are suggested by his writings and personal commentaries, especially on environmental awareness and activism culture. Still further, his impacts on consumer and fan cultures, in Japan and globally, offer a potentially fruitful avenue for cross-cultural research.

Final Thoughts

Debatably, the results of Miyazaki's subversion of branding and soft power can only be deemed to be effective once Miyazaki's career moves into its legacy stage – where all we have left to judge him on is the creative work he has left behind. We will only know if his subversions have been effective when programme enactors and investors either adjust or remove specific parts of their agendas, programmes and/or policies in response to public and/or economic pressures. Between that future point and the present there is a myriad of discussions and studies that can be developed to further test the natures of branding and auteur driven subversion.

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that within the sphere of Japanese media, there is an ongoing debate, or perhaps even a contest or a war, between programme enactors and investors and creative individuals or groups, one which Miyazaki has stood at the front lines of for over 30 years, producing works, large and small, that seek to address the innumerable forms of influence that programme enactors and investors wish to wield. Without doubt, it has been his works that have allowed other creative entities to challenge societal preconceptions and to re-evaluate not only what it means to be Japanese, but also what it means to be a human in a dehumanising capitalist world.

There can be no doubt, either, that Miyazaki's legacy as both an auteur and an agent of subversion is assured and that this shall continue to generate research and discourse in many fields. In fact, his legacy is only set to increase in importance as the global media market continues to expand and more international media consumers demand the versions of Miyazaki's works that are the least afflicted by cultural translations – this shall ensure that there remains strong debate around the visual meaning and allegories in Miyazaki's

filmography, as well as about the potential for others – be they consumer or auteur – to take up his subversive messages as part of their personal causes and projects.

It can be concluded that Miyazaki does not wish to tell his audience what or how to think. Rather, he invites them *to think*, to question, to ponder and to challenge the images and agendas that they are constantly presented with and pressured by throughout their lives. Across many levels, Miyazaki wishes to replenish his self-confidence to confront the supposed reality that is handed down by the various programme enactors and investors who, like the occupants of Plato's allegorical cave, are trying to convince others that the shadows they cast are the real world. In this lies Miyazaki's true ability as an agent of subversion; he is able to reach across so many stratifications of society and over all borders – be they geographical, social or political – readying his audiences against agenda and indoctrination without presenting himself as an authority figure who must be obeyed. Thus, Miyazaki is the kindly uncle to the phantom of Big Brother, who holds our hand just enough for us to stand on our own feet before he watches us make our way out into the world. In the end, that becomes Hayao Miyazaki's true strength and legacy; his challenging of accepted and enforced norms will be the thing that many will remember him for – even if they were unaware of it at the time.

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